

Before the Public Library

# Library of the Written Word

VOLUME 61

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## The Handpress World

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# Before the Public Library

*Reading, Community, and Identity in the  
Atlantic World, 1650–1850*

*Edited by*

Mark Towsey  
Kyle B. Roberts



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*To Stephen Colclough*





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# Introduction

*Mark Towsey and Kyle B. Roberts*

Public libraries are today valued as a vital public good and a fundamental plank of western, liberal democracies. Organised and funded by the state, the conventional assumption is that they exist primarily as a service to provide books that readers can borrow for free. When that core service is threatened, as it has been in recent years on the one hand by the emergence of the digital book and on the other by austerity measures on both sides of the Atlantic, communities protest against the potential loss of what some see as a “trademark of a civilised society”.<sup>1</sup> This sacred idea of the free-to-access Public Library supported by taxation is, however, a relatively young one, dating back to the passage of the Public Libraries Act in 1850 in the United Kingdom and the founding of the Boston Public Library in 1852 in the United States.

Historically speaking, the Public Library is only the most recent solution to the problem of how communities provide themselves with books. The current breed of Public Libraries displaced a flourishing, unregulated library culture built not by the state but by autonomous individuals acting from a range of motivations throughout the Anglophone Atlantic world between the mid-seventeenth and mid-nineteenth centuries. Over these two centuries, people from a vast diversity of backgrounds founded private membership book clubs and subscription libraries; well-to-do patrons formed libraries for specific audiences, like mechanics and apprentices; professional and artisanal groups congregated in vocational libraries for association and self-improvement; booksellers operated commercial libraries, hiring out books for profit; coffee-houses, taverns, inns and other public spaces provided print material to be read and debated; and religious groups provisioned libraries for charitable purposes and to encourage spiritual awakening. In the self-confident Whigish historiography of the middle of the twentieth century, these old models of library management were plotted more or less seamlessly onto a single line of progressive development leading towards the triumph of the modern public

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<sup>1</sup> This slogan was used, for instance, to protest against library cuts in Lincolnshire in the UK in 2015; ‘Government may face legal action over library cuts’, *The Spalding & South Holland Voice*, 1 May 2015 (<http://www.spaldingvoice.co.uk/government-may-face-legal-action-over-library-cuts/>, accessed 16 February 2017).

library system.<sup>2</sup> Yet each of these ‘community libraries’,<sup>3</sup> as we refer to them in this volume, was historically contingent on the social and cultural conditions of the period and community in which it emerged. Each points not towards a predestined future of public libraries for all, but to long-running debates in their own time that spread around the Atlantic world about who should have access to books, what they should read, and how ‘community’ – or the ‘public’ – should be defined. The essays collected in this volume delve into these historic debates about what libraries meant to readers and their communities, in the belief that a deeper understanding of the historical dimensions of library culture can make an important contribution to contemporary debates on the future of public libraries.

### Before the Public Library

We can appreciate the complexity of the landscape that flourished before the emergence of the Public Library by taking a cross-section of library culture in a single community. The English seaport of Liverpool had emerged as one of the fastest growing and best connected towns in the Atlantic world by the beginning of the nineteenth century. Its population grew from a little under 6,000 in 1700 to well over 80,000 in 1800, built on the back of the town’s profitable

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2 Paul Kaufman, for example, concludes that these libraries were “aspects of a momentous advance in a restless social urge for wider outlooks”; *Libraries and their Users: Collected Papers in Library History* (London: The Library Association, 1969), p. 219; for other surveys in this vein, see Jesse H. Shera, *Foundations of the Public Library: The Origins of the Public Library Movement in New England* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1949); Thomas Kelly, *Early Public Libraries: A History of Public Libraries in Great Britain before 1850* (London: Library Association, 1966). Thomas Augst suggests that this old-style historiography in America took “as self-evident the importance of libraries, collapsing the expansion of public access to books and education with the onward march of democracy in the United States”; Thomas Augst, ‘Introduction’, in Thomas Augst and Kenneth Carpenter (eds.), *Institutions of Reading: The Social Life of Libraries in the United States* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), pp. 1–21, at p. 2. For a retrospective on American library historiography of the twentieth century, see Wayne A. Wiegand, ‘American Library History Literature, 1947–1997: Theoretical Perspectives?’, *Libraries & Culture*, 35.1 (Winter, 2000), pp. 4–34.

3 The term was coined by Paul Kaufman to describe the diverse library landscape of the period; ‘The Rise of Community Libraries in Scotland’, *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 59.3 (1965), pp. 233–94; ‘The Community Library: A Chapter in English Social History’, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, 57.7 (1967), pp. 3–67.

transatlantic trade in sugar, cotton and African slaves.<sup>4</sup> Liverpool was one of the first communities in the British Isles – and almost certainly the first in England – to adopt the formal model of voluntary library building that had originated in colonial America in the first half of the eighteenth century with Benjamin Franklin's Library Company of Philadelphia. Established in 1731, the Library Company provided a group of like-minded artisans and tradesmen with a shared collection of books to provoke discussion and debate.<sup>5</sup> Formed in 1758 by a relatively modest group of professional men, tradesmen, merchants and schoolmasters, the Liverpool Library operated similarly: its members agreed to pool their resources to build up a circulating collection of periodicals and books to facilitate discussion and creativity.<sup>6</sup> Over the next half-century, the Liverpool Library expanded dramatically. By 1800 it possessed more than 8,000 books and very nearly 900 members – neatly encompassing both the community's dramatic rise and the unadulterated appeal of this form of cooperative library building across the urban landscape.<sup>7</sup>

Not everyone was pleased with the Liverpool Library's extravagant growth. In 1797 an eminent group of civic leaders met to draw up a set of proposals for a new institution to be called the Athenaeum Library and Newsroom. The rival group's *Proposals* complained about the sheer size of the Liverpool Library, its indiscriminating approach to acquisitions, and its inflexible opening hours unsuited to the busy lives of powerful captains of commerce and industry. They emphasised, too, that the Athenaeum's new collection – importantly, a reference library rather than circulating collection – would be tailored particularly towards the commercial needs of its proprietors. But the Athenaeum was from the outset about so much more than simply acquiring books.<sup>8</sup> As Arline Wilson

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4 For the background, see John Belchem (ed.), *Liverpool 800: Culture, Character & History* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006); Diana E. Ascott, Fiona Lewis and Michael Power, *Liverpool 1660–1750: People, Prosperity and Power* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006).

5 Shera, *Foundations*, pp. 30–32, 54–56; Edwin Wolf II, *At the Instance of Benjamin Franklin: A Brief History of the Library Company of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: The Library Company of Philadelphia, 1976).

6 Kaufman, *Libraries and their Users*, p. 214.

7 M. Kay Flavell, 'The Enlightened Reader and the New Industrial Towns: A Study of the Liverpool Library, 1758–1790', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 8.1 (March 1985), pp. 17–35, at p. 20; David Allan, *A Nation of Readers: The Lending Library in Georgian England* (London: British Library, 2008), p. 66.

8 *Outlines of a Plan for a Library and News-Room*, 22 November 1797; reprinted in Neville Carrick and Edward L. Ashton, *The Athenaeum Liverpool, 1797–1997* (Liverpool: Athenaeum Liverpool, 1997), pp. 45–47; Allan, *Nation of Readers*, p. 66. Mark Towsey and David Brazendale

has shown, the Athenaeum was an integral moment in “the development of an ambitious cultural infrastructure”, which was to be “instrumental in redefining the identity of the town and its merchant elite” as a second Florence through the production and patronage of culture, art and literature.<sup>9</sup> The 500-strong membership, who paid heavily for the privilege, constituted the great and the good of civic Liverpool, and used the Athenaeum as a platform to revolutionise the city’s civic landscape. They founded a Botanic Garden (1802), the Academy of Art (1810), a new Literary and Philosophical Society (1812) and an Institution for the Promotion of Literature, Science and the Arts (1814) which received the royal charter in 1821.<sup>10</sup> The Athenaeum influenced the much-maligned Liverpool Library as well. Inspired no doubt by the cultural ambition of the younger upstart, members of the Library agreed in 1802 to occupy part of the Lyceum building, a grand new neoclassical structure complete with coffee room, newspaper reading room, lecture rooms and a grand circular library space, recently put up at the head of the town’s cultural district on Bold Street, and a far cry from the original ‘library’ kept in a locked chest in the home of surveyor William Everard.<sup>11</sup> The Library itself was renamed after the Lyceum, reflecting the grander cultural references that now underpinned its ambitions.

Liverpool’s elite library projectors embarked on yet another collaborative venture in the early 1820s, this time clubbing together to form a library specifically for the ‘deserving poor’. The Liverpool Mechanics & Apprentices Library (founded in 1824) allowed joiners, printers and coopers access to books they could not otherwise afford. David Hume’s *History of England* was proudly pronounced to be the first book borrowed from the Library on 1 May 1824 by cabinetmaker Hugh Campbell in the printed circular designed to drum up

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are preparing a scholarly edition of the Proposals and first Minute Book of the Liverpool Athenaeum, 1797–1809, for the *Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*.

- 9 Arline Wilson, “‘The Florence of the North?’: The Civic Culture of Liverpool in the Early Nineteenth Century”, in A. Kidd and D. Nicholls (eds.), *Gender, Civic Culture and Consumerism: Middle Class Identity in Britain, 1800–1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 34–46, at p. 34. For the comparison with Florence, see Donald A. Macnaughton, ‘Roscoe, William (1753–1831)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edition <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/24084>, accessed 28 February 2017; Arline Wilson, *William Roscoe: Commerce and Culture* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008); Stella Fletcher, *Roscoe and Italy: The Reception of Italian Renaissance History and Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (London: Routledge, 2016); Rosemary Sweet, ‘British Perceptions of Florence in the Long Eighteenth Century’, *Historical Journal*, 50.4 (Dec. 2007), pp. 837–59, especially pp. 838–39.
- 10 Wilson, ‘Florence of the North’, pp. 37–38.
- 11 Flavell, ‘Enlightened Reader’, p. 21.

philanthropic supporters.<sup>12</sup> But readers had little say about what books were included in the collection, and when and where they might be read. An exclusive committee of proprietors decided on opening hours and borrowing terms, and approved the books that would be made available to readers – largely through charitable and philanthropic donation, a recurring mechanism of community library building across the period. Moreover, library membership was priced at a level to exclude the very people who ended up using its books. Their access derived from the chief privilege conferred by membership: the ability to recommend deserving readers from the lower reaches of society, who appear to have actively used the collection to their own ends.<sup>13</sup>

Although these three libraries clearly served quite different communities of readers, they were part of the same wave of voluntary association that swept across the British Atlantic in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Library builders were inspired by new cultural assumptions about the improving power of conversation and structured sociability, the social and civic benefits of collective cooperation, and the fundamental importance of books in stimulating debate and mutual self-improvement.<sup>14</sup>

Liverpool also had a wide variety of other libraries, some of which were underpinned by quite different assumptions, motivations and necessities. More specialist associational libraries sprang up among Liverpool's professional groups, providing technical works that assisted the continuing professional development of the town's medical men (1775), botanists (1800) and lawyers (1827).<sup>15</sup> Such specialisation quickly spread to other groups of mutual interest in the town, with libraries established to support seamen (1829) and farmers (1841) residing in or near the town, or visiting it temporarily. Libraries were also a key part of the arsenal available to religious communities in their competition for

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12 *An Account of the Liverpool Mechanics and Apprentices' Library: being a succinct view of the rise, progress and objects of the institution, its constitution and laws, with the mode of keeping accounts, so as to combine accuracy with despatch; intended to illustrate the advantages of similar institutions and as a guide to their establishments in other parts of the Kingdom* (Liverpool: Rushton and Melling, 1824), p. 25.

13 Allan, *Nation of Readers*, p. 199.

14 Peter Clark, *British Clubs and Societies, 1580–1800: The Origins of an Associational World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

15 *Catalogue of the Liverpool Medical Library, Shaw's Brow* (Liverpool: F.B. Wright, 1823); *Catalogue, with the First Report of the Committee of the Liverpool Law Library, established Nov. 1827* (Liverpool: Evans, Chegwin and Hall, 1829). Where no source is given, the following paragraphs draw on Robin Alston, 'The Library History Database: British Isles to 1850', <[www.r-alston.co.uk/contents.htm](http://www.r-alston.co.uk/contents.htm)> (accessed March 2008); the database is presently held off-line at the Institute of English Studies, London (hereafter, Alston).

souls. The old chained library at St Peter's Anglican Church was joined by libraries operated by the Friends Meeting House on Hunter Street (1800), the Unitarian Paradise Street Chapel (1824), the Catholic Circulating Library (1830) and the Brunswick Library (1805) attached to the Methodist Chapel on Pitt Street.<sup>16</sup> And while Liverpool's seafaring history has long been marked by religious diversity, her commercial outlook also had an influence on library provision. Remarkably, no fewer than 190 booksellers advertised commercial circulating libraries of one sort or another in Liverpool before 1850, including Richard Warbrick's Circulating Library, Edward Willan's English and French Circulating Library and the Minerva Circulating Library, operated by local historian Thomas Troughton.<sup>17</sup>

On top of all this, there flourished an unknown number of smaller, more informal and often quite short-lived book clubs and reading associations. Book clubs that met at the Merchants' Coffee-House on Dale Street and the Talbot Inn on Water Street had merged to form the Liverpool Library in 1758,<sup>18</sup> while later examples – such as the Union Newsroom of 1801 and the Philomathic Society of 1823 – allowed for still further refinement of the subscription library concept expressed by the Lyceum and Athenaeum. This was in addition to the informal and interpersonal book lending that must have taken place on an *ad hoc* basis between families and friends throughout the period, but which is very rarely captured in the historical record.<sup>19</sup>

16 Henry Peet, *An Inventory of the Plate, Register Books, and Other Moveables in the Two Parish Churches of Liverpool ... together with a Catalogue of the Ancient Library in St. Peter's Church...* (Liverpool: Thomas Brakell Limited, 1893); *A Catalogue of Books in the Library of Friends, Hunter-Street, Liverpool* (Liverpool: Printed by James and Jonathan Smith, 1820); *Catalogue of Pitt Street Library; to which are Prefixed the Rules of the Institution and a List of the Subscribers* (Liverpool: Printed by Nuttall, 1805); Alston; Allan, *Nation of Readers*, p. 181. For the influence of religious dissent on Victorian Liverpool's intellectual culture, see James A. Secord, *Victorian Sensation: The Extraordinary Publication, Reception and Secret Authorship of Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), Chapter 6. Many thanks to David Brazendale for providing information on the chained library at St Peter's.

17 *Catalogue of Warbrick's England and Foreign Circulating Library, Lime Street* (Liverpool: Printed for R. Warbrick, 182-?); *Catalogue of Willan's Extensive and Improving English and French Circulating Library, 62 Bold Street* (Liverpool: Printed for E. Willan by E.B. Wright, 1820?); *Catalogue of the Minerva Library, 45, Ranelagh-Street, Liverpool* (Liverpool: Printed by T. Troughton, 1805?), Houghton Library copy, Harvard University; Alston.

18 Allan, *Nation of Readers*, p. 54.

19 For examples of interpersonal book lending, see Mark Towsey, "I can't resist sending you the book": Book Lending, Elite Women and Shared Reading Practices in Georgian Scotland', *Library & Information History*, 29.3 (2013), pp. 210–22; Mark Towsey, "The Talent hid in a Napkin": Castle Libraries in Scotland, 1770–1830', in Katie Halsey and W.R. Owens (eds.),



Liverpool's history during the period covered by this volume – and the place of libraries within it – reveals trends common to many communities on either side of the Atlantic. It experienced rapid and profound change, with people arriving to settle there from very different social and cultural backgrounds, attracted by the promise of participation in a thriving Atlantic, and increasingly global, economy. Although an unusually large number of libraries was required to meet demand in a town of Liverpool's size, the same range of library models might have been found in any major urban centre in the Anglophone Atlantic world, and in many smaller and less dynamic communities. Similar examples can be found throughout the essays gathered together in this volume.

While most of Liverpool's libraries fervently believed themselves to be contributing to the public good, none were public in the sense that we have come to expect today – supported by taxpayers and lending books free of charge to the whole community. Rather, they played a crucial part in the emergence of an Enlightened 'public sphere', providing "a space where civic, religious, and commercial values converged and overlapped" for the improvement of the local community.<sup>20</sup> Joanna Innes suggests that "a leitmotif" emerged in this period that "libraries had a *public* function", with "their mission to serve variously conceived publics".<sup>21</sup> At the small harbour town of Kirkcudbright, on the Solway Firth, for instance, the community leaders who gathered together in 1770

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*The History of Reading, Volume 2: Evidence from the British Isles, c. 1750–1950* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 15–31; Allan, *Nation of Readers*, pp. 212–14; Isabelle Lehuu, 'Reconstructing Reading Vogues in the Old South: Borrowings from the Charleston Library Society, 1811–1817', in Shafquat Towheed and W.R. Owens (eds.), *The History of Reading, Volume 1: International Perspectives, c. 1500–1990* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 64–83, at pp. 68–69; Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray, 'Home Libraries and the Institutionalisation of Everyday Practice in Antebellum New England', in Thomas Augst and Wayne A. Wiegand, *The Library as an Agency of Culture (American Studies, Special Issue on Culture and Libraries, 42.3 [Fall 2001])*, pp. 63–86, especially pp. 71–76.

- 20 Ross W. Beales and James N. Green, 'Libraries and their Users', in Hugh Amory and David D. Hall (eds.), *A History of the Book in America, Volume 1: The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 399–404, at p. 400. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. by Thomas Burger with Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989); see also James Van Horn Melton, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), especially pp. 3–15.
- 21 Joanna Innes, 'Libraries in Context: Social, Cultural and Intellectual Background', in Giles Mandelbrote and K.A. Manley (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland, Volume 2: 1640–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 285–300, at p. 285 (original emphasis).

to found a library by subscription “unanimously agree[d] that a Public Library, established at this place upon a proper foundation and under proper regulations, will be attended with great improvement as well as entertainment”.<sup>22</sup> Members of the Library Company of Philadelphia would have agreed, writing as early as 1732 that their collection addressed the colonial government’s failure to provide for “public Education”;<sup>23</sup> importantly, Franklin himself took to calling it the “Philadelphia publick Library”.<sup>24</sup> A number of library communities likewise elected to inscribe their ‘public’ character formally in the names they choose for their library, including the Norwich Public Library (founded in 1784), the Bolton Public Library (around 1790) and the short-lived Bath Public Library (1801) in England; the Dundee Public Library (1796) in Scotland; and the Ipswich Public Library (1791) and the Natick Public Circulating Library (1808) in Massachusetts.<sup>25</sup>

That all of these examples were essentially private membership clubs reminds us that this library culture remained socially exclusive, and at every level users required some form of material, social, religious or moral capital to access the books. To own books required significant capital investment. Although book owners tended to be quite liberal in loaning books to friends, neighbours, business associates and even local tradesmen, artisans, shepherds and estate workers, such library access depended on the generosity, trust and patronage of library owners. In the commercial circulating libraries borrowers paid a fee to take out books, while the associational book clubs, reading societies, social libraries and subscription libraries levied charges for membership that – in the upper echelons at least – were generally quite prohibitive. As at the Liverpool Athenaeum, these charges sometimes operated alongside strict entrance criteria enforced by the routine ‘black-balling’ of undesirable prospective members in a deliberate attempt to maintain exclusivity, allowing

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22 Hornel Library, Broughton House, Kirkcudbright, MS4/26, ‘Minute Book of the Kirkcudbright Subscription Library’, 1 May 1770; see Mark Towsey, *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment: Books and their Readers in Provincial Scotland, 1750–1820* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 56–57, 63–65.

23 Cited in James Raven, *London Booksellers and American Customers: Transatlantic Literary Community and the Charleston Library Society, 1748–1811* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), p. 9.

24 Cited in James Green, ‘Subscription Libraries and Commercial Circulating Libraries in Colonial Philadelphia and New York’, in Augst and Carpenter (eds.), *Institutions of Reading*, pp. 53–71, at p. 54.

25 Alston; ‘The Davies Project at Princeton University: American Libraries before 1876’, <<http://daviesproject.princeton.edu/databases/index.html>> (accessed 28 February 2017).

local elites to use subscription libraries to exercise cultural leadership.<sup>26</sup> And while efforts intensified to provide libraries for those less able to pay – meeting a demand for mutual self-improvement pioneered in working-class book clubs and mechanics institutes that was later formalised in the Public Libraries movement – these efforts were often funded by social elites, who helped to decide which books to supply and which individuals were deemed worthy of such support.<sup>27</sup>

### Libraries and Their Users

These libraries, then, are in reality far removed from the idea of the Public Library that we have today, but at a time when that very idea is being challenged from every conceivable direction – by an inhospitable funding environment, by emboldened commercial providers, by the rise of digital media, and by reading activists calling for the idea of the library to be fundamentally reinvigorated – research on what these historic models of library culture meant to individual readers and their communities has never been more relevant.<sup>28</sup> Parts of this history are already very well known. These libraries tend to be studied most often for what they tell us about reading habits and the circulation of books. What might be termed the ‘reading vogues’ approach to eighteenth-century libraries was pioneered in a sequence of articles and monographs by the late Paul Kaufman, originally a Shakespearean scholar and a professor of psychology,

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26 Allan, *Nation of Readers*, pp. 64–84; K.A. Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders. Scottish Circulating and Subscription Libraries before 1825: A Survey and Listing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Bibliographical Society in association with the National Library of Scotland, 2012), pp. 36–45; Raven, *London Booksellers*, pp. 37–52, 67–83, 227.

27 See, for instance, Steven Shapin and Barry Barnes, ‘Science, Nature and Control: Interpreting Mechanics’ Institutes’, *Social Studies of Science*, 7.1 (1977), pp. 31–74. For examples of library culture instigated and exploited by the literate working classes themselves, see Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001); Peter Hoare, ‘The Operatives’ Libraries of Nottingham: A Radical Community’s Own Initiative’, *Library History*, 19.3 (2003), pp. 173–184; John C. Crawford, ‘The Ideology of Mutual Improvement in Scottish Working Class Libraries’, *Library History*, 12.1 (1996), pp. 49–61; John C. Crawford, “‘The High State of Culture to which this Part of the Country has Attained’: Libraries, Reading, and Society in Paisley, 1760–1830’, *Library & Information History*, 30.3 (August 2014), pp. 172–194.

28 For an overview of some of the current challenges, see Mark Towsey, ‘Public Libraries on Trial: A Policy Provocations Postscript’, available online at <https://liverpool.academia.edu/MarkTowsey> (accessed 28 February 2017).

who turned to bibliography and library history in his retirement.<sup>29</sup> As the title of his collected essays reveals, Kaufman's approach was predicated on library "users" and their reading interests, derived from the close study of acquisition lists, book catalogues, surviving copies and above all lending records. Thus his influential study of the Bristol Library Society tabulated the relative popularity of 900 titles borrowed 13,497 times between 1774 and 1785, revealing the "ten most popular books, with their scores". This demonstrated the great appetite for travel writing in a city defined by its oceanic trade, but also that 'Medicine and Anatomy' ranked "in last place with a feeble showing".<sup>30</sup>

Although his work on Bristol has been very widely cited in the decades since it first appeared, Kaufman himself cautioned that it represented only an "introductory study" and subsequent scholars have responded enthusiastically to his call for a further "refinement" in approach.<sup>31</sup> We can now draw on a very diverse range of individual case studies showing in sometimes startling detail how specific communities – and specific readers – navigated the world of print. Thus Isabelle Lehuu's study of the borrowing records of the Charleston Library Society in the second decade of the nineteenth century sees book circulation as a "dynamic process" tied to "individual stories and social networks". She reveals that thirty-eight percent of the loans of David Hume's *History of England* can be associated specifically with the sons of subscribers intent on historical self-education, and that Mary Brunton's far-fetched didactic novel *Self-Control* was "familiar to most book-reading Charlestonians,

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29 *Washington Post*, 23 September 1979. Many of Kaufman's most important essays appeared in relatively obscure journals and magazines, and appeared only in abridged format in *Libraries and their Users*. For specific contributions, see especially *Borrowings from the Bristol Library, 1773–1784: A Unique Record of Reading Vogues* (Charlottesville, VA: Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia, 1960); 'Eighteenth-Century Book Clubs and their Role in Social History', *Libri*, 14.1 (1964–5), pp. 1–31; *Reading Vogues at English Cathedral Libraries of the Eighteenth Century* (New York: New York Public Library, 1964); 'The Rise of Community Libraries in Scotland'; 'The Community Library: A Chapter in English Social History'.

30 Kaufman, *Borrowings from the Bristol Library*, pp. 122, 121.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 127. We await further detailed study of the full run of Bristol records, which extend well into the nineteenth century, but Kaufman's statistics still tend to be the first (and often the sole) reference point for generalist studies looking for evidence of what eighteenth-century people read. See for instance, John Brewer, *Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1997), pp. 151–52, 531; Jan Golinski, *Science as Public Culture: Chemistry and Enlightenment in Britain, 1760–1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 73–74; Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England, 1727–1783* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 94–95.

Federalists and Republicans alike”.<sup>32</sup> Vivienne Dunstan, likewise, treats the charitably-endowed Gray Library in Haddington, Scotland, as a functional provider of books, distinguishing between books chosen for professional or vocational necessity, self-improvement and entertainment. Tellingly for the tendency to view libraries as masculine spaces in this period, Dunstan highlights the use of the library by a bookish group of school-age girls who visited the library together on a frequent basis.<sup>33</sup> Mark Towsey, meanwhile, examines the reading habits of Napoleonic prisoners of war posted on parole in the small Borders town of Selkirk, where they were allowed unfettered access to the local subscription library and borrowed plays by Molière, Marivaux, Shakespeare, Foote and Joanna Baillie to perform at their makeshift theatre.<sup>34</sup>

Behind these various case studies lies a stark reality: at a time when readers were constantly bombarded with advice about the beneficial effects of reading, there were very real practical problems involved in enacting that advice. At the very least, these included the prohibitively high cost of new books, the very small print runs in which they initially appeared, and the expense and logistical complications invariably involved in transporting books from wholesalers in London.<sup>35</sup> As the late Stephen Colclough pointed out, this meant that individual readers habitually ended up “procuring texts” from many different outlets. Thus an apprentice cutler intent on self-improvement through reading in 1790s Sheffield, Joseph Hunter (discussed at length in Chapter 7), “procured” reading material from book shops, commercial libraries, itinerant booksellers and at least two subscription libraries – “each lay within walking distance of

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32 Lehuu, ‘Reconstructing Reading Vogues’, pp. 65–66, 74 and 77–78; on historical education, see Mark Towsey, *Reading History in Eighteenth-Century Britain and America* (forthcoming); Mark Towsey, “‘The book seemed to sink into oblivion’: Reading Hume’s *History* in Eighteenth-Century Scotland”, in Mark Spencer (ed.), *Hume: Historical Thinker, Historical Writer* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press), pp. 81–102.

33 V.S. Dunstan, ‘Glimpses into a Town’s Reading Habits in Enlightenment Scotland: Analysing the Borrowings of Gray Library, Haddington, 1732–1816’, *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, 26 (2006), pp. 42–59.

34 Mark Towsey, ‘Imprisoned Reading: Napoleonic Prisoners of War at the Selkirk Subscription Library, 1809–1815’, in Eve Rosenhaft, Erica Charters and Hannah Smith (eds.), *Civilians and War in Europe, 1640–1815* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), pp. 241–61.

35 For the high price of books see James Raven, *The Business of Books: Booksellers and the English Book Trade, 1450–1850* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 302–3. David Allan points out that Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* appeared initially in a run of just 500 copies, and that even Jane Austen’s *Emma* was available in perhaps 2,000 copies in the first few years it was available on the market; *Nation of Readers*, p. 25.

his home in Norfolk Street and he used them in conjunction with the private libraries of family and friends to read widely".<sup>36</sup>

In many cases, the 'reading vogues' approach has been used to address central questions in literary and intellectual history. Detailed study of commercial circulating library records from the period has complicated conventional narratives about their supposed role in facilitating the rise of the novel. Jan Fergus, for instance, overturns contemporary stereotypes in showing that men borrowed novels just as much as women,<sup>37</sup> while several scholars have shed considerable doubt on the prevailing assumption that circulating libraries dealt mainly in light fiction at the expense of supposedly more serious genres.<sup>38</sup> Library records have also been used to dramatic effect by scholars intent on historicising Robert Darnton's theoretical model for the circulation of books, especially where it applies to the social, cultural and geographical reach of the books of the Enlightenment.<sup>39</sup> Detailed work on the holdings of social libraries, circulating libraries and personal collections by Mark Spencer has proved conclusively that the philosophical and historical works of David Hume circulated widely in colonial America, underpinning Spencer's contention that Hume's ideas played an important role in helping Americans to articulate their grievances against the imperial power.<sup>40</sup> David Allan and Mark Towsey have used library records to show the very wide circulation of the works of the Scottish Enlightenment in England and Scotland respectively, supplementing and, at times, complicating the supply-side evidence provided by Richard Sher's account of the relationship between authors

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- 36 Stephen Colclough, *Consuming Texts: Readers and Reading Communities, 1695–1870* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 97–98.
  - 37 Jan Fergus, *Provincial Readers in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Jan Fergus, 'Eighteenth-Century Readers in Provincial England: The Customers of Samuel Clay's Circulating Library and Bookshop in Warwick, 1770–1772', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 78.2 (1984), pp. 155–213.
  - 38 Norbert Schürer, 'Four Catalogs of the Lowndes Circulating Library, 1755–66', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 101.3 (2007), pp. 329–57; K. A. Manley, 'Booksellers, Peruke-makers and Rabbit-merchants: the Growth of Circulating Libraries in the Eighteenth Century', in R. Myers, M. Harris and G. Mandelbrote (eds.), *Libraries and the Book Trade: The Formation of Collections from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century* (New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press, 2000), pp. 29–47; Allan, *Nation of Readers*, Chapter 4; Towsey, *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment*, Chapter 3.
  - 39 Robert Darnton, "'What is the History of Books?' Revisited', *Modern Intellectual History*, 4.3 (2007), pp. 495–508.
  - 40 Mark G. Spencer, *David Hume and Eighteenth-Century America* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2005).

and publishers.<sup>41</sup> More localised case studies have revealed how specific communities engaged with profound scientific, social and economic change during this period, including the popularisation of Newtonian science in colonial and early republican New York,<sup>42</sup> the reception of works of agricultural improvement in the hillside farming community of Selkirk,<sup>43</sup> and the dissemination of information about technological innovation at libraries in industrial Leeds.<sup>44</sup>

Such work has been enhanced still further by the increasing sophistication of digital approaches in library history, which have opened up bibliographical analyses of a depth and complexity that Kaufman can only have dreamt of, working as he did remotely and by hand from photocopies and microfiches provided by libraries in the UK. One notable early digital project used the borrowing registers of the Library of Harvard College to explore the diffusion of print in New England in the disruptive years of the Revolutionary War, showing that the Revolution had “remarkably limited impact on the reading of its patrons”.<sup>45</sup> More recently, scholars have shed important new light on the history of English dissent using library records from leading dissenting academies remediated in an online virtual library system.<sup>46</sup> Similar digital projects on the other side of the Atlantic

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- 41 David Allan, *Making British Culture: English Readers and the Scottish Enlightenment, 1740–1830* (London: Routledge, 2008); Towsey, *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment*; Richard B. Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book: Scottish Authors and their Publishers in Eighteenth-Century Britain, Ireland and America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).
  - 42 Laura Miller, *Reading Popular Newtonianism, 1670–1792* (forthcoming, University of Virginia Press).
  - 43 Mark Towsey, “Store their minds with much valuable knowledge”: Agricultural Improvement at the Selkirk Subscription Library, 1799–1814’, *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 38.4 (2015), pp. 569–84.
  - 44 Rebecca Bowd, ‘Useful Knowledge or Polite Learning? A Reappraisal of Approaches to Subscription Library History’, *Library & Information History*, 29.3 (2012), pp. 182–95; Rebecca Bowd, ‘Subscription Libraries and the Development of Urban Culture in the Age of Revolution: The Case of Leeds, 1768–1832’, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leeds, 2016.
  - 45 Mark Olsen and Louis-Georges Harvey, ‘Reading in Revolutionary Times: Book Borrowing from the Harvard College Library, 1773–1782’, *Harvard Library Bulletin*, n.s. 4 (1993), pp. 57–72, at p. 72; for the technical approach, see pp. 62–4.
  - 46 Dissenting Academies Online: Virtual Library System (<http://www.qmulreligionandliterature.co.uk/research/the-dissenting-academies-project/dissenting-academies-online/>). See Kyle B. Roberts, “I Have Hitherto Been Entirely Upon the Borrowing Hand”: The Acquisition and Circulation of Books in Eighteenth-Century Dissenting Academies’ in Frank Felsenstein and James J. Connolly (eds.), *Print Culture Histories Beyond the Metropolis* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), pp. 54–87.

have made available fully-searchable holdings and borrowings from the late eighteenth-century New York Society Library, the antebellum Easton Library Company (see chapter 12), and the late nineteenth-century Muncie Public Library.<sup>47</sup> Such approaches hold out immense promise for the future. One international team of researchers is currently developing a database project that aims to set surviving library catalogues from across the eighteenth-century Anglophone world alongside other major historical bibliometric datasets from the period such as book trade records and auction catalogues.<sup>48</sup> This may ultimately allow scholars from diverse disciplinary backgrounds to recover and interpret potentially global patterns of book use in the long eighteenth century.

### Libraries and Their Communities

Libraries have never been solely about book use, and much recent work has taken seriously the wider cultural and civic functions that libraries played between 1650 and 1850. Various scholars have interpreted the emergence of lending libraries during this time as a central part of the cultural renovation undergone by English provincial towns as a result of rapid demographic change and the new-found wealth and leisure time that came to elites from industrial innovation and transoceanic commerce, a process Peter Borsay has

47 City Readers (<http://cityreaders.nysoclib.org/>); the Easton Library Company Database (<http://digital.lafayette.edu/collections/eastonlibrary/>); and What Middletown Read (<http://www.bsu.edu/libraries/wmr/>) [accessed 10 March 2017]. For scholarship derived from the last of these, see Frank Felsenstein and James J. Connolly, *What Middletown Read: Print Culture in an American Small City* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015).

48 Simon Burrows, 'Locating the Minister's Looted Books: From Provenance and Library History to the Digital Reconstruction of Print Culture', *Library & Information History*, 31.1 (February 2015), pp. 1–17; Simon Burrows *et al.*, 'Mapping Print, Connecting Cultures', *Library & Information History*, 32.4 (2016), pp. 259–71; A.C. Montoya, 'French and English Women Writers in Dutch Library Catalogues, 1700–1800: Some Methodological Considerations and Preliminary Results', in S. van Dijk, P. Broomans, J.F. van der Meulen and P. van Oostrum (eds.), *"I have Heard about You": Foreign Women's Writing Crossing the Dutch Border, From Sappho to Selma Lagerlöf* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2004), pp. 182–216; and Mark Towsey, 'Book Use and Sociability in Lost Libraries of the Eighteenth Century: Towards a Union Catalogue', in F. Bruni and A. Pettegree (eds.), *Lost Books: Reconstructing the Print World of Pre-Industrial Europe* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016), pp. 414–38. On the concept of historical bibliometrics, see Jean-Pierre V.M. Herubel, 'Historical Bibliometrics: Its Purpose and Significance to the History of Disciplines', *Libraries & Culture*, 34.4 (Autumn 1999), pp. 380–8.



influentially termed the ‘English Urban Renaissance’.<sup>49</sup> By depending on mutual cooperation and reifying the cultural value of Addisonian politeness and structured sociability, libraries served as “tangible expressions of the ideal of voluntary associationalism” – every bit a part of the emergence of the “associational world” proposed by Peter Clark as were clubs and societies devoted to debating, art, theatre, music, sport and social reform.<sup>50</sup>

In this reading, the books offered by community libraries were a means to an end, rather than an end in their own right. Thus Franklin and his fellow Junto members wanted to have the books they talked about on hand when they met, but it was their conversation – rational, informed debate enshrining the “amiable collision” of ideas so influentially endorsed by Lord Shaftesbury – that was the primary cultural and social objective.<sup>51</sup> David Allan, indeed, insists that subscription libraries should be considered a “successful popularisation of Shaftesbury’s teachings, in which culture and morality were regarded as being inextricably linked”.<sup>52</sup> In small communities scattered throughout the Atlantic world – towns and villages of a thousand people or less, with insufficient resources to sustain more ambitious forms of cultural, sporting or reformist associationalism – a subscription library or book club was one of the few viable means by which community leaders could hope to imitate – perhaps emulate – the cultural preoccupations of the major urban centres. Here they could enact the behaviour outlined in the pages of the *Tatler*, the *Spectator* and dozens of later publications that preached the cultural benefits of structured sociability.<sup>53</sup>

49 Peter Borsay, ‘The English Urban Renaissance: The Development of Provincial Urban Culture, c. 1680–c. 1760’, *Social History*, 2.5 (1977), pp. 581–603; Peter Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in the Provincial Town, 1660–1770* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). A symposium to celebrate twenty-five years since the publication of Borsay’s book was held at the Centre for Urban History, University of Leicester, on 18 July 2014 under the title ‘The English Urban Renaissance Revisited’; an edited volume arising from the symposium is in preparation.

50 Allan, *Nation of Readers*, p. 13; David Allan, ‘Politeness and the Politics of Culture: An Intellectual History of the Eighteenth-Century Subscription Library’, *Library & Information History*, 29.3 (Sep 2013), pp. 159–69; Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*.

51 Lord Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, 3 vols (London: John Darby, 1711), i. 64–65; Wolf, *At the Instance*; J.A. Leo Lemay, *The Life of Benjamin Franklin, Volume II: Printer and Publisher, 1730–1747* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), pp. 93–94.

52 Allan, *Nation of Readers*, p. 107.

53 Mark Towsey, ‘First Steps in Associational Reading: Book Use and Sociability at the Wigtown Library, 1795–99’, *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 103.4 (2009), pp. 455–95.

While many hundreds of these smaller libraries never moved beyond the library as primarily a virtual space – located physically only in a chest or on bookshelves kept in a bookshop, church hall, school room, or in the private home of a member, librarian or office-holder – the cultural meanings of library associationalism ultimately helped them to take on wider physical significance.<sup>54</sup> In time, many libraries came to be “central to perceptions of local identity and civic-mindedness”, with office-holders listed proudly at the front of local trade directories and, when resources permitted, housed in monumental neoclassical structures erected to symbolise in stone both the library’s “fashionable leadership of a rapidly developing urban community” and its “steadfast devotion to time-honoured cultural values”.<sup>55</sup>

While historians have stressed the cultural meanings of library associationalism, they have also documented the wider community – and ‘public’ – roles taken on by libraries, as venues for conviviality and social networking, and as fulcra for other kinds of civic behaviour, including philanthropy, social reform and cultural politics. It has been argued that the self-styled “curators” of the Perth Library, founded in 1784, developed an acquisitions policy with little reference to the wants and needs of the membership but designed instead to intervene publically in the cultural politics of the Scottish Enlightenment. Concerned about the pernicious influence of speculative philosophy in Enlightenment Edinburgh (notably, the anticlericalism of David Hume and the philosophical historiography of Moderate clergyman William Robertson), Perth’s civic leaders used the library to express their support for the newly founded Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, deliberately setting out to prioritise works of local history and antiquarianism, and thereby embracing “a safer and more dependable ... empirically-based intellectual culture”.<sup>56</sup>

Libraries intervened not only in the intellectual and cultural but also the temporal lives of their communities. The founders of the Social Library in Portsmouth, New Hampshire (founded 1750), argues Jim Piecuch, “had more than reading in mind”. Portsmouth’s civic leaders used their new Social Library to coordinate and promote various social welfare priorities, aiming to alleviate the episodic periods of economic distress and social dislocation that were a fact of life in any early modern seaport, as well as the specific social problems

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54 Thomas Augst reminds us that one conventional meaning of the term ‘library’ in the eighteenth century was a bookcase; ‘Introduction’, p. 4.

55 Allan, *Nation of Readers*, pp. 71, 90.

56 David Allan, ‘Provincial Readers and Book Culture in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Perth Library, 1784–c. 1800’, *The Library*, 3.4 (2002), pp. 367–89, at pp. 375, 386. For the wider context, see Towsey, *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment*, Chapter 7.

inflicted on their community by the end of King George's War (1744–48). Their flagship project was to build a new workhouse for the community. In the library's first five years its leaders "devoted more attention to the construction of a workhouse than they did to their book collection"; when the workhouse was complete, support for the library seems to have evaporated.<sup>57</sup>

If some community libraries existed in large part to get things done, it has not escaped notice that they were used by members as a means to connect themselves socially to each other and to civic leaders within their community. Subscribers to the Liverpool Library also subscribed to other important local institutions, including the charitable Bluecoat School, the Infirmary, the Dispensary, the School for the Blind and the Lunatic Asylum. Echoing the concerns of the Portsmouth Social Library, no fewer than nineteen Overseers of the Poor of the Parish, charged with inspecting the local poor house, subscribed to the Liverpool Library.<sup>58</sup> In a remarkable demonstration of the potential application of social network analysis to library history, John Haggerty and Sheryllyne Haggerty have treated the committee of the Liverpool Library as a form of social network, tracing how its membership overlapped with other forms of institutional and associational membership in this period. Their work suggests that Liverpool merchants congregated in relatively inward-looking, "bonded networks", rather than "bridging" out towards new connections in other institutions. The tendency of Liverpool's merchants to associate socially and culturally with other mercantile families already within the same networks, they suggest, explains some of the dysfunctionality of Liverpool's trading community and its relative sluggishness in responding to wider changes in national and international trade and politics.<sup>59</sup>

Indeed, the exclusivity of library membership is a common refrain of work in this area, particularly as scholars start to trace the fate of community library culture in the nineteenth century. Piecuch concludes that "what mattered to the leading citizens of Portsmouth was having a social library; supplying and using it were far less important".<sup>60</sup> Nearly seventy years later, the Portsmouth Athenaeum Society (founded in 1817) is said to have operated obstinately as "the central social institution of a tight-knit elite that continued to dominate

57 Jim Piecuch, "Of Great Importance Both to Civil & Religious Welfare": The Portsmouth Social Library, 1750–1786', *Historical New Hampshire*, 57.3/4 (Fall/Winter, 2002), pp. 66–84, at p. 72.

58 Flavell, 'Enlightened Reader'.

59 J. Haggerty and S. Haggerty, 'The Life Cycle of a Metropolitan Business Network: Liverpool 1750–1810', *Explorations in Economic History*, 48 (2011), pp. 189–206, at p. 204.

60 Piecuch, "Of Great Importance", p. 76.

civic life", despite the rapidly changing political and demographic landscape of antebellum America.<sup>61</sup> Others have suggested that the social priorities and cultural practices of civic leaders changed in the mid-nineteenth century, making it harder for associational libraries to prosper.<sup>62</sup> For example, civic voluntarism enshrined in the foundation of the Liverpool Athenaeum at the beginning of the nineteenth century gave way to a more contained and exclusive sense of "public enterprise", as second and third generation proprietors looked to entrench their status as civic leaders.<sup>63</sup>

While the cultural and civic functions of community libraries have been shown to have changed over time, in tune with wider demographic, cultural and social trends, historians have argued that community libraries meant very specific things in an imperial and colonial context. Various scholars have shown that committed library supporters carried the seeds of library culture with them when they moved from one place to another, caring not only about the pragmatic functions of a library (in facilitating reading), but also about its civilising potential. Jon Mee has noted that members of the Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society were later implicated in the foundation of the South African Literary Society (1824) in Cape Town,<sup>64</sup> while libraries were founded in Niagara and Tasmania in the opening decade of the nineteenth century by people familiar with subscription libraries in provincial Scotland.<sup>65</sup> Keith Adkins suggests that associational libraries like the Bothwell Literary Society provided "improving and instructional literature for the promotion of education, prosperity, sobriety and cohesion in the fledgling community", but in doing so they were a collective investment in civil society, imported by communities to overcome the dislocated isolation and rampant self-interest of early colonial Australia.<sup>66</sup>

The work of James Raven on the Charleston Library Society (founded 1748), is especially suggestive in this respect. He argues that the Library Society "was

61 Michael A. Baenen, 'A Great and Natural Enemy of Democracy: Politics and Culture in the Antebellum Portsmouth Athenaeum', in Augst and Carpenter (eds.), *Institutions of Reading*, pp. 72–98, at p. 83.

62 Allan, *Nation of Readers*, p. 109.

63 Wilson, "Florence of the North", p. 44.

64 Jon Mee, 'Trans-Pennine Enlightenment', unpublished paper given at the 'Networks of Improvement: British Literary Clubs and Societies c. 1760–c. 1840' conference held at the University of York in March 2015.

65 Towsey, 'Book Use and Sociability'; Keith Adkins, *Reading in Colonial Tasmania: The Early Years of the Evandale Subscription Library* (Melbourne: Ancora Press, 2010), p. 49.

66 Adkins, *Reading in Colonial Tasmania*, p. 167.

founded to prove that the civilisation of Britain and Europe was transportable and sustainable”,<sup>67</sup> and not simply in the pages of the books that made the long journey from London booksellers to library shelves in South Carolina. Instead, Raven invokes anthropologists Clifford Geertz and Anthony P. Cohen to contend that the cultural politics, acquisition policies, scientific ambitions, decorative book plates, civic rituals and associational affairs of the Charleston Library Society were symbols of cultural identity, carefully curated and performed to display the library community’s affiliation to European – rather than American – manners and assumptions. Crucially, Raven suggests that in colonial communities so physically and spatially distant from metropolitan levers of power, such behaviour – and the wider social exclusivity of many community libraries already noted – took on important political dimensions. Libraries’ “symbolic power” became “a key determinant of exclusive social authority”.<sup>68</sup> All of this has important ramifications, of course, for our understanding of what happened after the Age of Revolutions, when the site of power and the culture of politics changed so radically. In these circumstances, some community libraries – such as Charleston and Portsmouth – were used to re-entrench elite power, while others enshrined and inculcated republican forms of political community.<sup>69</sup>

Ultimately, then, community libraries have been vested with a central role in the development and dissemination of radically new forms of political community. Thus Lynda Yankaskas’s revisionist account of the founding of the Boston Athenaeum in 1807 stresses the ideological meanings of the institution, not of its books. Drawing on Robb Haberman’s work on “provincial nationalism” in the new nation, Yankaskas suggests that “the library project ... was explicitly part of nation-building, a tool to create a new citizenry for a new country”. Crucially, this new identity was rooted in locally specific understandings of republicanism that emerged from direct competition with rival communities and community libraries in New York and Philadelphia.<sup>70</sup> For Elizabeth McHenry, the conversations opened up by

67 Raven, *London Booksellers*, p. 218.

68 James Raven, ‘Social Libraries and Library Societies in Eighteenth-Century North America’, in Augst and Carpenter (eds.), *Institutions of Reading*, pp. 24–52, at pp. 35, 37.

69 Raven, ‘Social Libraries and Library Societies’, p. 50.

70 Lynda K. Yankaskas, ‘Origin Stories: The Boston Athenaeum, Transatlantic Literary Culture, and Regional Rivalry in the Early Republic’, *The New England Quarterly*, 89.4 (December 2016), pp. 614–42, at p. 632; Robb K. Haberman, ‘Provincial Nationalism: Civic Rivalry in Postrevolutionary American Magazines’, *Early American Studies*, 10.1 (Winter 2012), pp. 162–93.

library sociability had specific political meanings for black Americans barred from other forms of library access. Reading and talking about library books together, she concludes, empowered marginalised readers “to forcefully enter into public debates about the future of black Americans in the United States and to raise the voice of conscience in a society seemingly deaf to its own ideas”.<sup>71</sup>

Community libraries beyond the United States opened up radically new opportunities for local populations to negotiate for themselves the implications of imperial rule. Priya Joshi has emphasised the empowering function of British fiction circulating in community libraries in colonial India. “The encounter with British fiction”, she suggests, “helped Indian readers translate themselves from a socially and politically feudal order to a modern one; from cultural and political subjection to conviction; from consumers to producers of their own national self-image”.<sup>72</sup> In colonial South Africa, Archie Dick has demonstrated that efforts to disseminate the self-empowering ideas of the Enlightenment and the Age of Revolutions through working-class libraries increased friction between colonists and native populations. While libraries allowed “new readers and writers ... to flex their literacy skills for political and practical purposes”, they also “provoked anger among colonists and farmers accustomed to cheap and docile labour, and heightened anxiety among the middle classes concerned about the social order”.<sup>73</sup>

### Reading, Identity and Community in the Atlantic World

Such is the vitality of this field and the wider significance of debates about reading and community opened up by recent work that we decided in 2013 to bid for funding from the UK’s Arts and Humanities Research Council for an international research network revisiting Paul Kaufman’s concept of the ‘community library’. That bid was successful, and a flourishing network of over eighty scholars has since grown up around the project, who share teaching strategies,

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71 Elizabeth McHenry, “‘An Association of Kindred Spirits’: Black Readers and their Reading Rooms”, in Augst and Carpenter (eds.), *Institutions of Reading*, pp. 99–118, at p. 118; Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

72 Priya Joshi, *In Another Country: Colonialism, Culture and the English Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 92.

73 Archie L. Dick, *The Hidden History of South Africa’s Book and Reading Cultures* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), p. 53.

organise conference panels together and collaborate on research.<sup>74</sup> Sixteen of these scholars are represented in the volume presented here. All are interested in similar questions about the use and meaning of libraries in the period before the emergence of the modern Public Library in the Atlantic World in the mid-nineteenth century, and are motivated by a desire to set the specific library communities they study in a more deliberately comparative context.

Library history, as with the wider history of books, has tended to be studied within narrowly defined national boundaries. Much of this work has been helpful in establishing patterns of development on a local and national basis, as witnessed particularly in the monumental *Cambridge History of Libraries in Great Britain and Ireland*, and in the complementary national book history projects – *The History of the Book in America*, *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, *The Oxford History of the Irish Book* and the *Edinburgh History of the Book in Scotland*. As yet, though, we have seen little sustained effort to trace the transnational and comparative history of libraries across different national, geographical and linguistic areas. Part of the challenge lies in the field's predilection for the micro-historical case study and the fact that it has produced relatively few dedicated research monographs.<sup>75</sup> For example, James Raven's work on the Charleston Library Society is the only book-length study of transatlantic library culture to emerge in the past generation.<sup>76</sup> David Allan notes that libraries are "a rare example of a major eighteenth-century cultural organisation that can begin to be understood in a genuinely British framework", but says very little about libraries in Ireland, Scotland and Wales, let alone about the parallel emergence of library culture in colonial North America or elsewhere in the British Empire.<sup>77</sup> Likewise, in the latest synthetic account of American library history, the esteemed library historian Wayne Wiegand argues that libraries "shaped the civic culture evolving around them" in the new nation without considering how distinctive those libraries might actually have been, or what was new about them.<sup>78</sup>

This is problematic in part because the emergence of library culture does not seem to have followed the conventional route from metropolis to province.

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74 For an archive of the network's activities, a full list of participants and other resources, see [www.communitylibraries.net](http://www.communitylibraries.net) [accessed February 2017].

75 For similar complaints, see Jonathan Rose, 'Alternative Futures for Library History', *Libraries & Culture*, 38.1 (2003), pp. 50–60.

76 Raven, *London Booksellers*.

77 Allan, *Nation of Readers*, p. 16.

78 Wayne A. Wiegand, *Part of Our Lives: A People's History of the American Public Library* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 16.

Kaufman highlighted the “instigating example” of metropolitan coffee-houses and book clubs in late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century England,<sup>79</sup> but the formal subscription or social library emerged for the first time in a colonial context, in the form of Franklin’s Library Company of Philadelphia. At least six more social libraries had been founded in colonial North America before libraries of this type started appearing first in Scotland in the early 1750s and then in the larger industrial towns of northern England from the late 1750s onwards. The first formal subscription library in London did not appear until relatively late, in 1785 – and even then, it was relatively short-lived.<sup>80</sup>

If the early history of subscription libraries in the Atlantic world seems to invert long-held assumptions about the relationship between metropole and province, other factors compel us to take a comparative, Atlantic approach more seriously. Books – and the ideas inscribed within them – moved across regional and national boundaries, travelling across seas to reach new communities and new readers. This volume introduces readers in industrialising Sheffield, polite Plymouth, rural Perthshire, cosmopolitan New York, small town Pennsylvania and colonial Brazil who were all reading the same books in the 1790s. They were connected to each other by words on the page even though they lived very different lives politically, socially and culturally. From the mid-seventeenth century onwards, people travelled as never before, moving from one part of the Atlantic to another, carrying books in their luggage and ideas in their heads – among them, as we have seen, ideas about what a library was and what a library could be.

Such is the clear interconnectivity of library culture across the British Atlantic in this period that Kaufman suggested that these libraries formed “a movement, a single spreading tide”.<sup>81</sup> While recent scholars might be more reticent to smooth over the differences between different types of libraries in different types of communities, the suggestion that they constituted “a movement” bears revisiting following the emergence of the ‘Atlantic paradigm’ in the 1990s. Atlantic History involves looking at the Atlantic as a single “system”, “region” or “zone of interaction among the peoples of Western Europe, West Africa and the Americas”, shedding local and national perspectives in favour of a wider regional view. As one of its leading proponents, Bernard Bailyn, suggests, when viewed in the context of “the Atlantic region as a coherent

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79 Kaufman, *Libraries and their Users*, p. 222; Kaufman, ‘Eighteenth-Century Book Clubs’; Markman Ellis, ‘Coffee-house Libraries in Mid-Eighteenth-Century London’, *The Library*, 10.1 (March 2009), pp. 3–40.

80 Kaufman, *Libraries and their Users*, Chapter 1.

81 Kaufman, *Libraries and their Users*, p. 219.



whole ... otherwise limited, local studies gain heightened meaning at a more general plane of significance".<sup>82</sup> James Raven agrees, suggesting that "the Atlantic might be examined as a zone of circulation and exchange, as the fulcrum of connections between four continents, or as a perspective that recasts national histories (many boasting an exceptionalism that can be much refined by transatlantic comparisons)".<sup>83</sup>

Certainly when cast in an Atlantic – rather than purely local or national – framework, it becomes obvious that the libraries that flourished before the emergence of the Public Library were subject to – and in many of the cases documented in this collection, contributed to – the same processes of economic expansion, empire building, voluntary and forced migration, social upheaval, religious renewal and political unrest that are fundamental to the history of the early modern Atlantic. At the very least, library historians are very well placed to address the intellectual and bookish dimensions of Atlantic history, including "the exchange of values and the circulation of ideas" across the Atlantic world.<sup>84</sup>

This collection, and the scholarly network from which it emerges, therefore seeks to consider community libraries as part of a movement, albeit one that was generally unplanned, haphazard and uneven geographically and socially. Although certain types of library were overseen by a central organising agency in this period (not least the religious libraries considered here by Louisiane Ferlier),<sup>85</sup> the volume explores the important (and neglected) sense in which these libraries constituted an interconnected whole even when they were

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82 Bernard Bailyn, 'Introduction: Reflections on Some Major Themes', in Bernard Bailyn and Patricia L. Denault (eds.), *Soundings in Atlantic History: Latent Structures and Intellectual Currents, 1500–1830* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 1–43, at pp. 1–2; see also Bernard Bailyn, *Atlantic History: Concepts and Contours* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); Jack P. Greene and Philip D. Morgan, *Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); William O'Reilly, 'Genealogies of Atlantic History', *Atlantic Studies*, 1.1 (2004), pp. 66–84.

83 Raven, *London Booksellers*, p. 14.

84 Jack P. Greene and Philip D. Morgan, 'Introduction: The Present State of Atlantic History', in Greene and Morgan (eds.), *Atlantic History*, pp. 13–38, at p. 14.

85 Thomas Bray's scheme of developing a nationwide network of parish collections in England was matched by similar efforts in America, Wales, Scotland and the Isle of Man; see Allan, *Nation of Readers*, pp. 164–74; G. Best, 'Libraries in the Parish' and W.M. Jacob, 'Libraries for the Parish: Individual Donors and Charitable Societies', both in Mandelbrote and Manley (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland, Volume 2 1640–1850*, pp. 324–44 and 65–82; W.R. Aitkin, *A History of the Public Library Movement in Scotland to 1955* (Glasgow: Scottish Library Association, 1971), pp. 8–18.

not centrally planned or organised. Rather than considering them solely as a sequence of separate institutions sealed off from each other, our contributors consider the different ways in which individual libraries and library communities were connected and worked to connect themselves with other libraries across the Atlantic world. By placing each of these libraries alongside each other, we seek to uncover the commonalities and divergences in experience, aiming to open up more sustained and detailed comparative studies in the future by showing the rich potential of this approach. In particular, we highlight a consistent tension between the 'private' interests and tastes of individual readers and the 'public' ambitions of the library community, blending the two approaches laid out in the preceding literature review. The collection thereby identifies the emergence of the modern Public Library in the mid-nineteenth century as a pivotal moment in the relationship between people and community across the Atlantic world, when local and community-based negotiations of library culture were set aside in favour of radical new ideas about the library as a public service and functional provider of books.

*Before the Public Library* is divided chronologically into four sections, each addressing what we see as a separate moment in the development of library culture in this period, and explaining the aims and motivations of the people involved. Part 1, 'Empire and Enlightenment', focuses on the earliest phases of library building in the Atlantic world, overlapping loosely with what has been termed the period of "Integration" in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, when "places within the Atlantic world became more interconnected and interdependent".<sup>86</sup> Louisiane Ferlier compares the transatlantic book distribution and library building strategies of two competing Protestant religious groups, the Anglicans and the Quakers, showing how the pragmatic realities of transplanting religious communities across the Atlantic intersected with religious faith. Both groups believed fundamentally in the efficacy of print to growing and sustaining their followers as they spread out across the Atlantic world. But their approaches to accomplishing this end in the colonies differed owing to important differences in the culture of their faiths, their access to modes of transportation, and the inclinations of their clergy and laity. In Chapter 2, Markman Ellis revisits instead an important precursor to formal library culture, the coffee-house library. These institutions have long been known to have had an early influence in promoting sociable reading and collaborative book collecting, and Ellis has previously done a great deal to deepen and complicate our understanding of the collections on offer

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86 Greene and Morgan, 'Introduction', p. 25.

in London coffee-houses.<sup>87</sup> Ellis's contribution to the current volume takes this work further, establishing the importance of coffee-houses as early sites of reading and sociability, and focusing especially on the centrality of poetry in coffee-house library culture. Ellis offers new material on coffee-house libraries around the mid-eighteenth-century Atlantic, revealing that the works offered by these libraries were not randomly accumulated texts, but were specifically chosen literary forms that both reinforced and shaped the civic culture of the 'First' British Empire.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 focus on the rarely considered role of the personal library in sustaining shared reading and in disseminating new ideas associated with the Enlightenment in the mid- to late-eighteenth century. Chapter 3 focuses on a notorious figure in Atlantic history, the Jamaican slave owner Thomas Thistlewood, showing how his personal library provides a new perspective on British social and intellectual life in a slave plantation society. At the same time, April G. Shelford fills an important gap in library history by revealing the largely overlooked world of private library building and informal book-lending in Jamaica, a colony that imported as many books as New York in the eighteenth century, but that did so without developing the formal library institutions found elsewhere in the British Atlantic. Chapter 4 looks to a much more familiar library, that of the Boswell family, to reflect on and complicate the idea of the private gentleman's library. By excavating the book collecting practises of three generations of Boswells, including most famously James Boswell, the biographer of Samuel Johnson, James J. Caudle reinterprets a kind of library found across the eighteenth-century Atlantic – the private family library – as a multigenerational and multi-locational institution that variously functioned as a physical space, a place for sociability, an intellectual tool, a financial asset, and – increasingly – a valuable part of the family's and wider community's heritage. The personal library of José Vieira Couto provides a quite different lens for recovering Atlantic intellectual currents pulsing in the Portuguese colony of Brazil in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Chapter 5 tracks the individual collecting impulse in this remote corner of the wider Atlantic world, but also reveals the circulation and discussion of enlightened texts among the creole Masonic networks in which Couto participated. Júnia Ferreira Furtado reveals both how startlingly cosmopolitan Couto's library and library-building connections were, and how building that collection helped to spread radical Enlightenment ideas that were ultimately to prove fatally undermining to the imperial project.

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87 Ellis, 'Coffee-House Libraries'.

Part 2, 'Revolution and Nation Building', deals with the political consequences of the dissemination of radical new ideas and the role of libraries in helping communities to construct new societies for themselves in the aftermath of political upheaval and social change. As Cheryl Knott shows in Chapter 6, the role of print in nation-building is deeply contested. The late Benedict Anderson famously identified the importance of print in creating new national cultures, while scholars such as Trish Loughran have warned about the material constraints that acted on identity formation through print.<sup>88</sup> Knott makes an innovative intervention in this debate by adopting a conventional library science methodology – the overlap study – to identify titles held in common by ten libraries in different parts of the young United States in the last decade of the eighteenth century. Knott's suggestive discovery is that these ten libraries shared far less 'common knowledge' than scholars have traditionally assumed. The focus in Chapter 7 turns back to England, and offers a remarkable insight into the ways in which libraries became the locus for the formation of different social groups in a rapidly growing northern English industrial city in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Loveday Herridge and Sue Roe present a comparative study of four distinct library societies, looking at how questions of class, religion and gender shaped the composition of each library community, as well as their collecting tastes and policies, civic engagement and organisational forms. Funded primarily from the fruits of transatlantic trade, library culture in Sheffield was in a constant state of flux, shaped both by local factors and by the broader currents of political and social change that swept across the Atlantic World in the age of Revolutions.

Chapter 8 looks at the contest over personal and community forms of identity that sprang up at an American social library occupying a particularly prestigious place in the political culture of the new nation, the New York Society Library, which briefly shared premises with the United States Congress in the 1780s. The founding and management of such institutions allowed those involved to put heady new ideas about republicanism and the nation into practice. By interrogating the common library building mechanism of book donation, Rob Koehler reveals the fragility of the cultural and political project pursued by eighteenth-century library communities, and the ways in which an institution's larger mission could be subverted by the quotidian interests of individual readers. While civic-minded library managers sought to build

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88 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2006); Trish Loughran, *The Republic in Print: Print Culture in the Age of U.S. Nation Building, 1770–1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

a serious and learned library fit for the citizenry of an emerging metropolis, their plans were undermined by members of the community reading for entertainment as much as edification. Chapter 9 picks up similar issues, asking fundamental questions about the social meanings of literary canonicity in the Romantic period by focusing on a charitable free library, founded by bequest in a rural community in late seventeenth-century Scotland. Readers at the Innerpefferay Library at the turn of the nineteenth century did not reject romantic titles on principle, but rather had little opportunity in their library to read them. Katie Halsey shows how material constraints influenced book provisioning at different times in a library's history, while revealing how some resilient rural readers appropriated an Atlantic revolutionary discourse about the rights of man to contest unsatisfactory library management.

Part 3, 'Institutionalisation and Expansion', examines the social, cultural and political roles played by libraries in the first half of the nineteenth century, as communities on both sides of the Atlantic emerged from revolutionary warfare and faced up to new social realities brought on by urbanisation and industrialisation. Protestant dissenters faced particular difficulties in maintaining and perpetuating a sense of religious community in the rapidly industrialising communities of the North of England. The central role played by benefaction in the growth of dissenting academic libraries of the nineteenth century is the central focus of Chapter 10. Amassing a sizeable collection could often be beyond the means of an institution, especially academies and colleges that served hundreds of students without any reliable or central form of income. Rachel Eckersley explores institutional annual reports and provenance marks in surviving books donated to dissenting academies to reveal how private books that had once belonged to clerical and lay dissenters came to be put to public use in building institutional library collections. Chapter 11 looks at a quite different social context, exploring how civic leaders invested the vast riches brought by naval warfare and privateering to the seaport of Plymouth in purpose-built cultural buildings intended to broadcast the prestige of their provincial community nationally and internationally. Annika Bautz assesses the motivations behind one such prestigious institution, the Plymouth Public Library, which was created to display the community's good taste as well as to supply serious texts more commonly available in the metropolis. In calling their library 'public', however, library managers meant that it was public only to those who could afford to pay the membership fee.

Such libraries were typically founded to supply a community with edifying reading material, often at the explicit repudiation of fiction. The Easton Library Company, formed in a small industrial town in Pennsylvania at the

nexus of major transportation routes, on the surface appears to be just another such library, with formal statements extolling the virtues of self-improvement through reading. Yet the rare survival of Easton's borrowing ledgers allows Christopher Phillips in Chapter 12 to reveal that its members demanded – and the library supplied – a significant amount of leisure reading. This chapter thereby augments others in the collection that wrestle with the disconnect between founders' lofty cultural ambitions and the often unedifying realities of individual reading tastes. Chapter 13 turns to the library building activities of the working classes. Scholars have long assumed that working men exploited the new breed of mercantile, apprentice and mechanics' libraries that proliferated on both sides of the Atlantic in the mid-nineteenth century in order to promote their social mobility through self-improving reading, and thereby facilitate their rise to the middle classes. Lynda Yankaskas interrogates this assumption through a detailed exploration of how young men actually used the Mechanic Apprentices' Library in Boston, Massachusetts. What emerges is a more complex understanding of how young men used the many facets of a community library to construct – and police – the boundaries of their own identity.

The concluding Part 4, 'Public Libraries', throws the lens forward, asking how it was that communities on either side of the Atlantic moved at roughly the same time towards a new idea of the Public Library as one that was organised and funded by the state, rather than by autonomous individuals acting in cooperation. In doing so, Tom Glynn and Alistair Black show that many of the same debates that recur throughout the volume continued to rumble on about who should read, what should be read and why that reading was thought to be valuable. By the mid-nineteenth century, however, these debates were starting to be played out in very different civic and ideological settings on either side of the Atlantic. In Chapter 14, Tom Glynn shows how American public libraries evolved incrementally from the community libraries of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. With no overriding national programme of library building in place, public libraries in many communities took over the provision – often, the very buildings – previously offered by community libraries. They remained private entities with their own separate governance arrangements quite distinct from city or municipal bodies, despite enjoying significant support from the public purse. In Britain, on the other hand, libraries were drawn in the middle decades of the nineteenth century into a wide ranging national debate about the role of the state and the beneficial outcomes of government intervention, which intruded into education, transportation, crime and punishment, employment and health care, as well as libraries. Crucially, as Alistair Black suggests in Chapter 15, the case for state intervention in libraries

was driven both 'from below' and 'from above', as ordinary readers, radical reformers and paternalistic civic leaders alike recognised the need for a central response to the dislocation and perceived degeneration brought about by unchecked industrialisation.

That American and British attitudes towards the new breed of public libraries seem on the face of it so very divergent fits well with the conventional conclusion that an 'Atlantic' perspective becomes less valuable as we move further into the nineteenth century, with the United States and Europe increasingly becoming closed off from one another rather than being grounded in the transatlantic commonalities of the previous centuries.<sup>89</sup> Of course the question of potential cross-fertilisation between British and American conceptualisations of the 'public library' after 1850 is one that bears further investigation, as just one of the gaps that remain in our understanding of libraries as an Atlantic phenomenon. After all, the natural function of an edited collection is not to provide closure on the themes that it investigates, but to test new perspectives, to open up new research questions and to stimulate future research in the field. Amongst the issues that we do not directly examine here, the commercial circulating libraries are probably the most obvious. These have been excluded from our discussion because they involve a quite different set of questions than the ones we have prioritised about community formation and the interests of individual readers, no matter how beneficial an Atlantic framework might be in helping future scholars to rethink commercial provision in this period.<sup>90</sup> While Furtado's chapter reveals the impact of European books on one library community in colonial Brazil, our contributors are concerned primarily with Anglophone connections in the North Atlantic and we await a more thorough comparative study of library culture in the non-Anglophone Atlantic.<sup>91</sup> At the same time, as a number of scholars have recently shown, there is an important sense in which the library culture we have focused on here spread well beyond the Atlantic in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, not least in the wider British imperial world.<sup>92</sup>

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89 Greene and Morgan, *Atlantic History*, p. 21.

90 For recent work on commercial circulating libraries in Britain, see the works cited in footnotes 40 and 41. For circulating libraries in America, see Green, 'Subscription Libraries and Commercial Circulating Libraries'; D. Kaser, *A Book for a Sixpence: The Circulating Library in America* (Pittsburgh, 1980).

91 See for example Cristina Soriano, *Tides of Revolution: Information and Politics in Late Colonial Venezuela* (forthcoming with University of New Mexico Press).

92 Wallace Kirsop insists that libraries in colonial Australia "in the 1840s could still replicate the conditions of provincial England fifty years or more before"; *The Bookshop as an "Index of Civilisation": The Case of the Walches in the 1840s* (Melbourne: The Chaskett Press, 2011),

Nevertheless, this volume shows the benefits of considering library history before the Public Library in an Atlantic perspective. Between 1650 and 1850, thousands of libraries were founded across the Atlantic world on a bewildering range of organisation models, none of which were 'Public' in the sense that we would recognise today. Membership libraries often reinforced existing hierarchies, allowing elites to express their cultural leadership of their communities and to restrict membership along political, social, religious and ethnic boundaries. But this period also witnessed increasing efforts, on both sides of the Atlantic, to form libraries for ordinary readers – providing access to life-changing ideas for all, enhancing social mobility, and meeting a demand for professional development and personal self-improvement. Donations, book stocks and acquisition policies shaped community values, identifying and reinforcing those books and ideas that were thought to define library users individually and collectively. Purpose-built library buildings provided community space where cultural practices could be disseminated and performed, but they also broadcast specific ideas about the community that had built them to national and international audiences. In the end, this flourishing, unregulated culture of libraries fostered communities of readers whose shared reading connected them to each other, and to millions of other readers across the Atlantic world long before the advent of modern public libraries.

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p. 9. For a separate imperial setting, see Sharon Murphy, 'Imperial Reading? The East India Company's Lending Libraries for Soldiers, c. 1819–1834', *Book History*, 12 (2009), pp. 75–99.



PART 1

*Empire and Enlightenment*





# Building Religious Communities with Books: The Quaker and Anglican Transatlantic Libraries, 1650–1710

*Louisiane Ferlier*

Susan O'Brien has noted the efficiency with which Evangelical books, papers and magazines crossed the Atlantic during the Great Awakening to cement spiritual bounds within the religious community,<sup>1</sup> pointing to the words of one Scottish evangelist – James Robe – who suggested that “The Design is very laudable and has already been of great Use. It is a choice Means to promote the Communion of Saints upon Earth”.<sup>2</sup> Robe recognised the importance of print for his own Evangelical movement, but his words echoed the century-old connection established between Protestantism and what Lawrence C. Wroth terms the “spiritual force” of the printing craft.<sup>3</sup>

The ways in which various denominations spread the Word through print have been well studied, but few of these studies consider the practicalities of the distribution and collection of books in the establishment of Protestant networks across the Atlantic.<sup>4</sup> Conception of heterodox ideas spreading as viruses led to a focus on the diffusion of print rather than on the places where books were preserved at their destination.<sup>5</sup> In order to turn literature into a tool for the advancement of religion, communities had to put in place financial arrangements capable of supporting the cost of composing, printing and transporting

1 Susan O'Brien, 'A Transatlantic Community of Saints: the Great Awakening and the First Evangelical Network, 1735–1755', *American Historical Review*, 94.4 (Oct 1986), pp. 811–32, at p. 828.

2 James Robe, *Christian Monthly History or an Account of the Revival and Progress of Religion Abroad and at Home*, 1.4 (Edinburgh, Nov 1743–Jan 1746), quoted in O'Brien, 'A Transatlantic Community of Saints', p. 828.

3 Lawrence C. Wroth, *The Colonial Printer* (Portland, ME: The Southworth-Anthoensen Press, 1938), p. 3.

4 The basis for studies of print and Protestantism remains Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

5 Martin Austin Nesvig, '“Heretical Plagues” and Censorship Cordons: Colonial Mexico and the Transatlantic Book Trade', *Church History*, 75.1 (2006), pp. 1–37, at p. 1.

books, but also to build places to house the collections. Through community funds, benefactions, patronage and commerce, members of various denominations could become active agents in the building of their transatlantic community. These networks, cemented by confessional trust, had been experimented with for half a century in Europe, but only a few denominations successfully bridged the Atlantic. Transatlantic colonisation posed new challenges: transportation costs were much higher and the vastness of the territories meant that denominations had to imagine new ways of reaching readers. Libraries constituted points of redistribution of books, integral to these networks, and played a crucial role in the context of early American colonies, not least because the American press was in its infancy. This chapter examines how Quakers and Anglicans – two denominations who explicitly conceived of the need for this transatlantic traffic of books – organised networks to attempt to establish libraries that would promote their faith and strengthen their communities.<sup>6</sup>

For some religious denominations, the colonisation of North America offered the possibility of new religious experiments, the promise of a New Jerusalem. Others considered that the expansion opened a continent of souls to be converted. For these transatlantic missions to be successful, the proselytes first had to establish reliable networks of exchange, so that men, goods and news reached both sides of the ocean. From Jesuits to Quakers, all considered religious literature to be an essential support in these campaigns, but the geographical expansion of readership could not yet be driven from within the American colonies. Indeed, during the period covered, from 1650 to 1710, only a very small number of printing houses operated in the American colonies, and almost all on a single press. The first press was established in Massachusetts in 1639; Georgia was the last of the thirteen colonies to see a printer settle 123 years later. In 1750, an estimated total of thirty printing houses operated in the colonies.<sup>7</sup> By comparison there were already thirty-three printing houses by 1668 in London, with an estimated seventy-two presses.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, colonial

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6 The two communities were strikingly different in terms of demographics: at the peak of Quakerism in the 1680s, it is estimated that, with 60,000 people, they composed 1.15 percent of the English population. However, as we will demonstrate in this chapter, both contributed crucially to the bookish culture of the early American colonies. E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541–1871: A Reconstruction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 92–96.

7 Isaiah Thomas, *History of Printing in America: With a Biography of Printers and an Account of Newspapers* (Worcester, MA: Isaiah Thomas Jun. and Isaac Sturtevant, 1810).

8 Donald Francis McKenzie, 'Printing and Publishing 1557–1700: Constraints on the London Book Trades', in J. Barnard and D.F. McKenzie (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, Volume 4: 1557–1695* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 555.

presses depended directly on exports from England for paper, ink and types that were, as indicated by the custom reports, more highly taxed than books. The Inspector General's report for exports leaving the Port of London shows that the price of books exported to the colonies was estimated based on their weight rather than their titles. This measure, in effect, valued paper at a higher price per stone than unbound books, a differential exacerbated still further by taxation.<sup>9</sup> As summarised by Hugh Amory, this meant that "European printing occupied the commercial sector of the market" in the colonies; "colonial printing was subsidized, official and of small commercial value".<sup>10</sup>

Libraries furnished with titles published in Europe appeared to constitute the best alternative to ensure that useful books were available to colonists. The idea of a library, however, is fluid. Collections of books took various forms from denomination to denomination and even within a single community. Financial support for the collections could come from common centralised funds collected in the metropolis, a tradesman dedicated to the religious cause could be hired at a preferential rate to publish a series of volumes, or individual benefactions within the colonies could contribute to the setting of a library in places of worship. Book collections could encompass prescribed literature or result from the serendipitous accumulation of individual titles. The leadership of the two religious communities examined here, Quaker and Anglican, had amassed financial funds and stocks of books in London to establish libraries and quickly organised a transatlantic network to circulate books. Investigating the specificities of these networks, this chapter considers the form taken by colonial religious libraries as indicating the general transatlantic culture of the rival religious groups. Quaker collections in America embodied the shifting meanings of public and private libraries, while Anglicans were reimagining the model of the institutional parish library in the context of imperial expansion.

### Quakers and the Informal Circulation of Books

Historians of the movement have studied extensively how early Quakers in Britain relied on print and have emphasised the value of their minute

9 Reference from the London Port Book for 1696–97, for Carolina for instance books for shipping are counted at 20s. per hundredweight (8st = 50kgs), while paper was estimated at 5s. per ream (1 ream = 500 sheets = ± 2kg). TNA, 'The Accounts of Exportations from the Port of London from Michælmass 1696 to Michælmass 1697', CUST 102, 1696–1697.

10 Hugh Amory, 'British Books Abroad: The American Colonies', in Barnard and McKenzie (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, Volume 4: 1557–1695*, p. 745.

record-keeping.<sup>11</sup> “They print at one time, more than they speak at a time”, mocked one of their adversaries as early as the 1650s. Hugh Barbour estimates that between 1650 and 1700, Quaker authors published 3,100 new titles (which would amount to 3.5 percent of all printed books).<sup>12</sup> Quaker print culture is characterised both by the sheer quantity of printed material kept in the central repository library of the Society in London and the care with which smaller provincial meetings kept their records. Thus Carol Edgerton Treadway suggests that the Quaker collections of Guilford College in Carolina resulted from:

A combination of organizational genius, practical necessity, and a strong instinct for history in the making provided motivation for establishing very early the practices of registering births, deaths and marriages; of minuting decisions made in meetings for business; and of preserving other important documents.<sup>13</sup>

Interestingly, while the omnivorous appetite of Quakers for record-keeping and printing has been previously identified and studied, one only finds passing mention of the creation of early Quaker libraries. Useful attempts to catalogue the entire Quaker literature or individual or institutional Quaker collections provide precious information on the content of these libraries, but they are not connected to the existing commercial and religious networks. Sometimes even the act of collecting is disconnected from the pacific “spiritual warfare”

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- 11 For a summary of the historiography, see, Kate Peters, ‘Patterns of Quaker Authorship, 1652–1656’, *Prose Studies*, 17.3 (1994), pp. 6–24, at pp. 6–7; K. Peters, *Print Culture and the Early Quakers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Thomas N. Corns and D. Loewenstein (eds.), *The Emergence of Quaker Writing: Dissenting Literature in Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Frank Cass, 1995).
  - 12 John Stalham, *Contradictions of the Quakers* (Edinburgh, 1655), p. 25; Hugh Barbour, *Early Quaker Writings, 1650–1700* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans publishing company, 1973), p. 14; Eltjo Buringh and JanLuiten van Zanden, ‘Charting the “Rise of the West”: Manuscripts and Printed Books in Europe: A Long-Term Perspective from the Sixth through Eighteenth Centuries’, *The Journal of Economic History*, 69.2 (June 2009), pp. 409–45, Table 2 at p. 417.
  - 13 Carole Edgerton Treadway and Albert Fowler, ‘Research Notes: Resources for Scholars: Four Quaker Collections in the United States: Part 1: Friends Historical Collection, Guilford College, and Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College’, *The Library Quarterly*, 60.1 (January 1990), p. 46. The Friends library in London was set up as a result of a 1674 decision by the Yearly Meeting to preserve two copies of all writings produced by members of the community and one copy of any work published against them.

in which the Friends were engaged.<sup>14</sup> For my Part, I would argue that the networks involved in exporting books to the colonies and their dissemination in individual collections indicate the complex systems by which individual authority was established by the concept of inward revelation.<sup>15</sup> Through the free distribution of books, the community contributed to colonial private collections as an intrinsic part of their internal network of diffusion. In return, as I will later illustrate with the example of Francis Daniel Pastorius, Quaker book owners opened their libraries to other readers. A major consequence of this blurring between private and public collections was that very few dedicated meetinghouse libraries were ever actually established in the colonies.

From the correspondence of the Society of Friends, which gathers the official epistles sent and received, we can infer that the impulse to circulate books within the Society came at once from local meetings who asked London Friends to send them printed pamphlets and from the authors themselves who wished for their texts to be read.<sup>16</sup> From the early 1680s, local meetings in the colonies served as financial and logistical relays between readers, while the central London Meeting piloted the circulation of Quaker ideas from the writing table to the reading table by editing, printing and financing the whole operation. Indeed, J. William Frost explains that in 1690 “Philadelphia Yearly Meeting requested six copies of every book printed by English Friends”, and that in 1702 “Philadelphia and London Friends agreed to send each other copies of each book defending or criticizing Friends”.<sup>17</sup>

As had been the case throughout England since the 1650s, “public funds” or “common stocks” were constituted by local meetings in the colonies to order copies of books printed by the London-based Quaker printer-bookseller and to support the endeavours of the ‘Travelling Friends’ who transported parcels of books from meeting to meeting.<sup>18</sup> The logistical role of local meetings is illustrated by an epistle sent by the Pennsylvania Meeting in March 1697,

14 Joseph Smith, *Bibliotheca Anti-Quakeriana and Descriptive Catalogue of Friends Books and Bibliotheca Quakeriana, or the Illustrated Catalogue of the Private Library of Charles Roberts of Philadelphia* – established for a public sale.

15 Quaker authors defined religious revelation as a phenomenon that could only truly manifest itself within the individual, considering that this ‘Inner Light’ of true Christianity could not be forced upon others.

16 Library of the Society of Friends, London, *Epistles received*, YM/EPR/1, 1683–1706; *Epistles sent*, YM/EPPS/1, 1683–1703; YM/EPPS/2, 1704–1738.

17 J. William Frost, ‘Quaker Books in Colonial Pennsylvania’, *Quaker History*, 80.1 (Spring 1991), pp. 1–23, at p. 1.

18 The first fund devoted to the impression and distribution of books was established at a local level, by Margaret Fell who created ‘the Kendal Fund’. Its treasurers were in charge

which acknowledged receiving “Fox’s *Journal* sent as legacy [... and] Edward Haistwell’s love and kindness to us in sending a Parcell of good friends books to be delivered amongst friends here that which were very serviceable to all people that were seekers after the blessed truth”.<sup>19</sup> Meetings in the colonies therefore acted only incidentally as libraries, as they received and organised the distribution of books and centralised demands from colonists. It transpires clearly from the official correspondence that the works were intended to be distributed, rather than kept in the meetinghouses. American letters reassure the London Yearly Meeting that the books were “dispersed among them” or as the Maryland Meeting specifies that “they are spread among friends for further service in which there is many needful, necessary & comfortable branches suitable to the state & condition of all”.<sup>20</sup> Whereas meeting libraries could have been described as “needful, necessary & comfortable branches suitable to the state & condition”, colonial meetinghouses rarely kept copies of the books that were sent to them. Frost noted that the most important colonial meeting, the Philadelphia Monthly Meeting, “authorized a collection of books and the minutes in 1705 mention loaning a copy of George Fox’s *Journal*” but concludes, “evidently, the library became moribund soon after”.<sup>21</sup>

The very short life of the first Philadelphia Meeting House library is certainly baffling considering the number of books sent from London and the importance of the library serving the Society of Friends in London. A library was indeed provisioned off Lombard Street at Three Kings Court in London as a result of the 1674 decision of the Second Day Morning Meeting to keep two copies of every text published by Quaker authors and one of each book written by their opponents or mentioning them. The role of this library in the Quaker printing network is considered elsewhere, but the collection of printed and manuscript documents was assembled in the view of supporting the defence of the Society, to memorialise (and sometimes mystify) the lives of its members and in a general sense, to inspire through the written medium. The library was also seen as a dedicated place to keep track of collective reflections on matters of doctrine in the absence of an official Quaker creed and, most importantly, to exist as a centre of organisation for the daily workings of the community.<sup>22</sup> Local meetings throughout England relied upon this organisation

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of distributing financial help to the traveling friends and from the correspondence we can infer that most of the sums were spent to pay Giles Calvert, the radical printer.

19 *Epistles received*, YM/EPR/1, 1683–1706, f. 268.

20 *Ibid.*, f. 73.

21 Frost, ‘Quaker Books in Colonial Pennsylvania’, p. 13.

22 Louisiane Ferlier, ‘Tace Sowle-Raylton (1666–1749) and the Circulation of Books in the London Quaker Community’, *Library & Information History*, 31.3 (Aug 2015), pp. 157–70.



to act as an archive and library for their community in connection with the London Second Day Morning Meeting from whom they requested books and sent information and contributions.

In theory, a similar organisation was put in place to connect colonial Quakers to London leaders in 1690 when the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting requested 6 copies of books written by English friends. The network of 'Traveling Friends' was enlarged to overcome the obstacles of transatlantic exportation. Transatlantic exchanges were built on faith and kinship. For instance, the first printer of Pennsylvania, William Bradford served his apprenticeship in the London shop of the Quaker printer-bookseller Andrew Sowle, and married one of his master's daughters, Elizabeth, before setting shop in Philadelphia. His sister-in-law Tace Sowle, who took over her father's business in Lombard Street with great success, later supported Bradford's printing enterprise in New York by willing him a large sum.<sup>23</sup> As can be observed in many other religious communities, family ties and denominations were seen as congruent to business, but Quaker merchants gained a reputation as transatlantic traders that went beyond their own community. In her 1988 article on the role of Quakers in Irish emigration to the American colonies, Audrey Lockhart suggests that "when the need arose, those people of whatever creed who wished to travel to or do business with North America could entrust themselves and their goods to Quaker merchants and shippers with rare confidence".<sup>24</sup> The solidity of the Quaker transatlantic network was largely based on their commercial fleet shipping passengers and goods from London, Bristol, Liverpool, Belfast and Scarborough.<sup>25</sup> The Quaker community benefited from a well-established system of distribution that could support the circulation of books necessary to establish a library in Philadelphia.

Whereas it kept the archival material related to its community on its premises, why then did the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting not organise a collection of printed books in America like the one in London? While the London Meeting gathered on a weekly basis, the Philadelphia Meeting recognised that its members were dispersed over vast distances and worship took place most often in the private sphere. By not replicating the centralised model of the London

23 William Bradford was the first of a long line of American printers, but he left the Society of Friends and Pennsylvania at the time of the Keithian schism in the 1690s, thereby depriving the Society and the colony of their only press. TNA, *Will of Tace Sowle Raylton, widow of All Hallows, Lombard Street*, 02 November 1749, PROB 11/774/275.

24 Audrey Lockhart, 'The Quakers and Emigration From Ireland to the North American Colonies', *Quaker History*, 77.2 (Fall 1988), pp. 67–92, at p. 69.

25 Marion Balderston, 'William Penn's Twenty-Three Ships', *Pennsylvania Genealogical Magazine*, xxiii.2 (1963), pp. 27–67.

Meeting, Quakers in Philadelphia acknowledged the primacy of London in matters of discipline and doctrine. However, another form of Quaker library emerged to serve the colonial community, in the same way that the Quaker doctrine was transformed by the challenges of the colonial experience. Rather than retaining copies in a centralised collection and consecrating the library as “mere storehouse of written texts”, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting distributed the books it received.<sup>26</sup> This was an attempt to entrust the library to the community, by following the dispersion of its members throughout the colonies. This adhered to the ethos of individual conscience put in place by William Penn (1644–1718) in Pennsylvania and supported by most American Quakers.<sup>27</sup> Such an intellectual and social context was favourable to the invention of a new type of Quaker reader who would rely on a personal library (whether his own, or one shared by a Friend) rather than one prescribed by the community.

The library and reading practices of Germantown Quaker Francis Daniel Pastorius (1651–1720) illustrate perfectly this transformation of the Quaker library.<sup>28</sup> Celebrated as the *exemplum* of an American member of the Republic of Letters,<sup>29</sup> polyglot Pastorius collected books, distributed them and preserved the nuggets of knowledge he read in his commonplace book, his *Bee-Hive*, which he collected for his sons’ use.<sup>30</sup> Pastorius placed Quaker books at the core of his fastidious and poetic collection: books were categorised as either Quaker or non-Quaker. He also redefined the library as a hive, as the product of a community of minds that collected and collated together

26 Ian F. McNeely and Lisa Wolverton, *Reinventing Knowledge: From Alexandria to the Internet* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), p. 255.

27 Andrew R. Murphy, *Conscience and Community: Revisiting Toleration and Religious Dissent in Early Modern England and America* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), especially Chapter 5.

28 Alfred Brophy, ‘The Quaker Bibliographic World of Francis Daniel Pastorius’s *Bee Hive*’, *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 122.3 (1998), pp. 241–91. Brooke Palmieri, ‘“What the Bees Have Taken Pains For”: Francis Daniel Pastorius, The Beehive and Commonplacing in Colonial Pennsylvania’ Final Paper submitted as Penn Humanities Forum, Mellon Undergraduate Research Fellowship, 2009. Lyman W. Riley, ‘Books from the “Beehive” Manuscript of Francis Daniel Pastorius’, *Quaker History*, 83.2 (October 1994), pp. 116–29.

29 Anthony Grafton, ‘The Republic of Letters in the American Colonies: Francis Daniel Pastorius Makes a Notebook’, *American Historical Review*, 117.1 (2012), pp. 1–39.

30 University of Pennsylvania Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Ms. Codex 726, ‘Francis Daniel Pastorius, His Hive, Melliotrophium Alvear, or Rusca Apium, Begun Anno Do[mi]ni or, in the year of Christian Account 1696’. Digital surrogate available as part of the digital collection of manuscripts published by the library, <http://hdl.library.upenn.edu/1017/d/medren/2487547> [accessed January 2017].

knowledge to form a cultural storehouse. As with Rotterdam Quaker Benjamin Furly (1636–1714), Pastorius considered the library not merely as the room of scholarly references, but as a place of exchange open to a community of readers: neighbours, ‘Traveling Friends’, fellow-lawyers or anonymous botanists.<sup>31</sup> Connecting the building of the religious community with the process of building a library, Pastorius’s practices “mediat[ed] between old world sensibilities and new world contingencies”, as best summarised by Patrick Erben:

Pastorius inscribed the coherence or overlapping of various realms of experience, knowledge and textuality on the title pages of his commonplace books: likewise, his practical or communal manuscripts bridge the ostensible gap between his activities of building the early German-American community in his writing.<sup>32</sup>

Pastorius reveals a world of books and a book culture available to the intellectual elite of early Quaker Pennsylvania. This American Quaker library – multilingual, interdisciplinary and at the service of its community – paved the way for James Logan’s *Logonian Library*. Such shared libraries were the product of the cultural context of the Pennsylvanian Holy Experiment. For example, farmer John Dickinson described how after settling by the Delaware, he became “master of my time, I spend a good deal of it in a library, which I think the most valuable part of my small estate”.<sup>33</sup> The term ‘valuable’ reveals that Dickinson’s private library was a place to cultivate the mind and to ensure the establishment of religious values, as well as a sign of financial success in the colony.

Over time, this culture of the shared library led to the involvement of Quakers in the development of subscription libraries in America. Again, rather than creating a subscription library affiliated to the Society of Friends, later in the eighteenth century large Quaker collections in America were dispersed between existing subscription libraries or cultural institutions. Quakers were an influential force in the foundation of Benjamin Franklin’s Library Company, which “employed local Quaker agents and general merchants to send over

31 Sarah Hutton (ed.), *Benjamin Furly, a Quaker Merchant and his Milieu* (Florence: Olschki, 2007). Pastorius was trained as a lawyer and his library did serve as a professional reference, as well as collecting references on botany, poetry and most importantly, Quaker thought.

32 Patrick M. Erben, “‘Honey-Combs’ and ‘Paper-Hives’: Positioning Francis Daniel Pastorius’s Manuscript Writings in Early Pennsylvania”, *Early American Literature*, 37.2 (2002), pp. 157–94, at pp. 160, 178.

33 John Dickinson, *Letters from a Farmer, in Pennsylvania, to the Inhabitants of the British Colonies* (Philadelphia, 1768), p. 3.

its books".<sup>34</sup> The involvement of Quaker booksellers in Philadelphia bookish endeavours was shaped by the culture of shared libraries sketched previously and supported by the efficient Quaker network of book distribution. More surprising, though, is James Raven's discovery of Quaker involvement in the Charleston Library Society before 1778:

The only outstanding group of sectarian publications acquired by the library in its first decades were several books relating to Quaker lives and thought. Even these were hardly unusual titles, comprising George Fox's *Journals*, Robert Barclay's *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, William Penn's *No Cross No Crown*, William Sewel's *History of the Quakers*, and Joseph Besse's *The Sufferings of the Quakers*. Most, moreover, had been donated by the Society of Friends, and politely, if not effusively, received.<sup>35</sup>

Raven's note that the donations were made by the Quakers themselves confirms that the strategy of diffusing Quaker print through non-denominational libraries was continued late in the eighteenth century. Raven remarks further that "from 1718, Logan [the then President of the Charleston Society]'s main agent was the Quaker writer Josiah Martin, and a twenty-five year series of book letters records the ups and downs of this personal transatlantic commerce".<sup>36</sup> American Quakers established themselves as key players in the book trade, not to build a *Bibliotheca Quakeriana* as their London brethren had, but to diffuse Quaker ideas as widely as possible. Uniquely, they did so through their professional services – as booksellers, printers and publishers – and by donating books within and without the community.

It seems, therefore, that the system of book diffusion put in place by the Society of Friends in America led books to move from library to library in an organic way, in opposition to the repository library of the London Quakers. Books circulated from meetings to private collections, from where they could be borrowed or read out loud to a larger audience. Quaker collecting and reading practices blurred the limits between the private and public spheres, a

34 E. Digby Baltzell, *Puritan Boston & Quaker Philadelphia* (1979; New Brunswick NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2007), pp. 169–71, Jacquelyn C. Miller, 'Franklin and Friends: Benjamin Franklin's Ties to Quakers and Quakerism', *Pennsylvania History*, 57.4 (October 1990), pp. 318–36, at p. 323. James Raven, *London Booksellers and American Customers: Transatlantic Literary Community and the Charleston Library Society, 1748–1811* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2001), p. 4.

35 Raven, *London Booksellers*, p. 163. The donation was made by the London Quakers (note 80, p. 81).

36 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

quality engrained in religious collections: it was common practice to use Bibles as registers, and Pastorius's *Bee-hive* demonstrates how often Quaker books were borrowed and lent.

The cultural value Pastorius and Dickinson attributed to their libraries in the newly established colony recalls John Francis McDermott's analysis of book and print culture in eighteenth-century Creole St Louis where, "on the confines of a wilderness" and without any printing press or public library, one would find thousands of books.<sup>37</sup> As John Neal Hoover wrote, rehearsing with brio McDermott's pioneering work on frontier cities, "the inhabitants did not stand idly by waiting for a critical mass of easterners to arrive in order to establish cultural institutions; rather, they gathered ideas, collected books and maps, and kept in touch with correspondents from a variety of places and people in the East, in Canada, in Europe and in Indian country".<sup>38</sup> The evolution of St Louis's print culture, from smaller private libraries to the foundation of a subscription library and then the first public city library repeats the pattern observed in Quaker book collecting, but with a century delay. Similarities between the developments of bookish institutions in Quaker Philadelphia and Creole St Louis echo in fact the organisational stages of many other colonial cities. It is the absence of important early collections directly tied with places of worship which is much more striking.<sup>39</sup> This, I propose, is a sign of the "creole culture" that characterised colonial Pennsylvania: the difficult and disputed balance between individual distinctiveness and community appears in the place given to the library within the Quaker community.<sup>40</sup>

37 John Francis McDermott, *Private Libraries in Creole Saint Louis* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1938), especially Part I, 'Cultural Conditions on the Confines of a Wilderness'.

38 John Neal Hoover, 'Private Libraries and Global Worlds: Books and Print Culture in Colonial St. Louis', in Jay Giltin, Barbara Berglund and Adam Arenson (eds.), *Frontier Cities: Encounters at the Crossroads of Empire* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), pp. 190–99, at p. 191.

39 McDermott considered that the absence of religious printing and religious collections in St Louis was best explained by the fact that "from the beginning Saint Louis was a commercial town. It was not a refuge for religious, political, or economic fugitives. Religion was a business left to the priest – when there was one in the neighbourhood. Those citizens who were religious had apparently a confidence in their God which sufficed; those who were not inclined toward religion tended to ignore it. Neither found reason to make a fuss about it"; *Private Libraries*, p. 17. This could hardly apply for Pennsylvania, the Quaker 'Holy Experiment'.

40 John Smolenski, *Friends and Strangers: the Making of a Creole Culture in Colonial Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

Print culture was therefore moulded by the religious values of the community. Quakers, who proclaimed to be the “Publishers of Truth”, identified themselves explicitly with the diffusion of the printed word.<sup>41</sup> The transatlantic passage, however, transformed deeply the *modus operandi* of the Quaker library. In order to pursue this discussion further, I will consider the role of libraries in the effort of the Anglican community to implant itself in the American colonies, as their proposition concerning the definition of the community and the public sphere clashed fundamentally with that of the Quakers.

### Thomas Bray and the Organisation of Anglican Libraries in America

Quaker print culture has been defined as an intimate component of their denominational identity. To try to identify a single Anglican print culture along the same lines, however, would ignore the coexistence of competing interpretations of Anglicanism. While the Quakers formed a close-knit community, demographically narrow and easily identifiable, Anglicans were too numerous to be considered as a single community united by common practices. Anglicanism’s legal status made it the official faith of Britain, but the 1707 recognition of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland blurred this status in the religious mosaic of the colonies. In the last decades of the seventeenth century, after a century of turmoil, members of the Anglican Church were precisely attempting to establish the boundaries of their community. Defenders of the High Church version of Anglicanism proposed to retain a strict liturgical definition while the Low Church party sought more practical ways to realise their inclusive vision of religion. On the subject of libraries, however, both High and Low Churchmen agreed: with the Book of Common Prayer as a common ground, collections of books constituted arsenals for the expansion of the faith and a “means by which the Church of England attempted to consolidate its position in the middle ground”.<sup>42</sup> From Sir Thomas Bodley’s monumental collections in Oxford to the meanest parish cupboard of books, libraries had always been an integral part of the diffusion and defence of the reformed Church of England.

In the context of the transatlantic expansion of Britain, the official restored Church had to face a double challenge: to participate in the colonisation

41 Peters, *Print Culture and the Early Quakers*, Chapter 1. Ernest E. Taylor, ‘The First Publishers of Truth’, *Journal of the Friends Historical Society*, 19 (1922), pp. 66–81.

42 Giles Mandelbrote, ‘The Historic Collections of Lambeth Palace Library’, Lecture given at Gresham College, 20 March 2013.

process while also strengthening its stronghold at home. To face these two challenges, the first Anglican missionary organisation was created in 1698: the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK hereafter) which supported parish libraries in England, Ireland and the Isle of Man. Its specifically transatlantic appendix, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in the Foreign Parts (SPG hereafter) was chartered in 1701.

The transatlantic endeavours of the SPG are minutely documented.<sup>43</sup> Where the Quakers relied organically on pre-existing trading routes, the Anglican society had to seek out support for the passage of books and missionaries. They petitioned in Parliament, and “ordered that all Members to this Society that are Ministers & Inhabitants of the City of London be desired to apply to the Eminent Merchants of the said city especially such of them as do trade into the Plantations for their Benefactions towards the Promoting the Designs of this Society in the Plantations”.<sup>44</sup>

Commissioning, editing and publishing sermons and accounts was one aspect of the purpose-built network for the diffusion of Anglican texts, but the creation of American libraries rapidly became the core of the missionary effort of the founder of the SPCK, Thomas Bray (1658–1730).<sup>45</sup> Bray had been appointed by his patron, the Bishop of London Henry Compton, as commissary to Maryland in 1699 and reported on the difficult material, intellectual and spiritual conditions in which the Anglican clergy officiated in the colony. Bray considered explicitly that libraries were the key to fulfilling the aim William III had entrusted to the SPG in its Charter, “to promote the Glory of God, by the Instruction of Our People in the Christian Religion” in the “Plantations, Colonies, and Factories beyond the Seas, belonging to Our Kingdome of England”. The foundation of American Episcopalian libraries in the colonies relied directly on this institution. Indeed, Bray considered that the difficulties posed by the transatlantic passage and the immensity and the diversity of confessions in the colonial territories had to be dealt with separately from the campaigns led in the British Isles. Bishop John Fletcher Hurst described Bray’s colonial

43 Bodleian Library Special Collections, Oxford, USPG Papers, *Journal of the SPG, 1701–1718*, vol.1, fol. 31. Only Virginia, under the governance of Col. Francis Nicholson was considered to have founded enough Churches, fol. 34.

44 *Journal of the SPG, 1701–1718*, vol. 1, fol. 33. Merchants often offered to carry books and missionaries in exchange the missionaries served as chaplains on board during the crossing.

45 On the SPG sermons, see Rowan Strong, ‘A Vision of an Anglican Imperialism: The Annual Sermons of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts 1701–1714’, *Journal of Religious History*, 30.2 (2006), pp. 175–98.

libraries as a “systematic and successful attempt”.<sup>46</sup> Bray created a standard collection of Anglican books, first by arming the SPG missionaries with sets of books (mostly Bibles and Common Prayer Books), and then by designing a larger collection intended to be the basis for parochial libraries to be lent or given away at the discretion of the minister.

Even before Bray founded the SPCK and the SPG, his “labors resulted in the establishment of thirty-nine parish libraries throughout Maryland, where he officiated from 1696 to 1700 as Commissary for the Anglican Church, and a few other colonies”. The size of the libraries varied from a few volumes to “over 1000 volumes given”.<sup>47</sup> Bray’s account book “of the Libraries sent into America and their respective value” reveals the monetary power of the network of benefactors on which he relied. For the libraries in Maryland, £808 15s. 6d. was raised, with an additional £80 for Virginia; £169 for New York; £66 16s. for Pennsylvania; £99 19s. 6d. for the Bermudas; £300 for Carolina; and £13 8s. 6d. for Jamaica. In addition, it was recorded that certain “supernumerary books have been given by some persons but not yet appointed to particular libraries”.<sup>48</sup> The accounts also detail the charges for the acquisition of book-presses, the shipping and cataloguing of books, demonstrating that Bray exported fully-furnished libraries across the Atlantic.<sup>49</sup> This first endeavour was the basis for the foundation of subsequent colonial libraries, as is made explicit in the title of Bray’s manuscript catalogue from 1701, *Bibliotheca Provinciales Americanae, Being the Registers of Books sent towards laying the foundacon [sic] of five more provincial Libraries in Imitation of that of Anapolis in Maryland, for the use and Benefit of the Clergy and others in the Provinces of New England, New York, Pensylvania, Carolina and Bermudas*.<sup>50</sup>

Following the title of the catalogue, Hurst considered that, “the books were of two classes – one for the use of the clergy, and such as only the clergy would be likely to read or were able to read. The rest of them were for the laity”. In fact, Bray designed a careful and systematic classification for the Anglican library. The books for the clergy were classified in twelve categories and

46 John Fletcher Hurst, ‘Parochial Libraries in the Colonial Period’, *Papers of the American Society of Church History*, 2.1 (1890), pp. 37–50, at p. 40.

47 Hurst, p. 43.

48 USPG Papers, Bray’s Associate MS, ‘Dr Bray’s accounts’, Part 1, vol. F. 11a., fol. 11–25.

49 Bray’s Associate MS, ‘Dr Bray’s accounts’, Part 1, vol. F. 11a. A more detailed study of Bray’s accounts book would reconstruct the entire network of his 1699 mission, including the provisions made for pensions of schoolmasters and the enigmatic ‘charges in soliciting the Bill for forfeiting lands given to superstitious uses’, fol. 41–42.

50 Bray’s Associate MS, ‘Catalogue of Books sent to America c. 1701’, vol. F. 37.



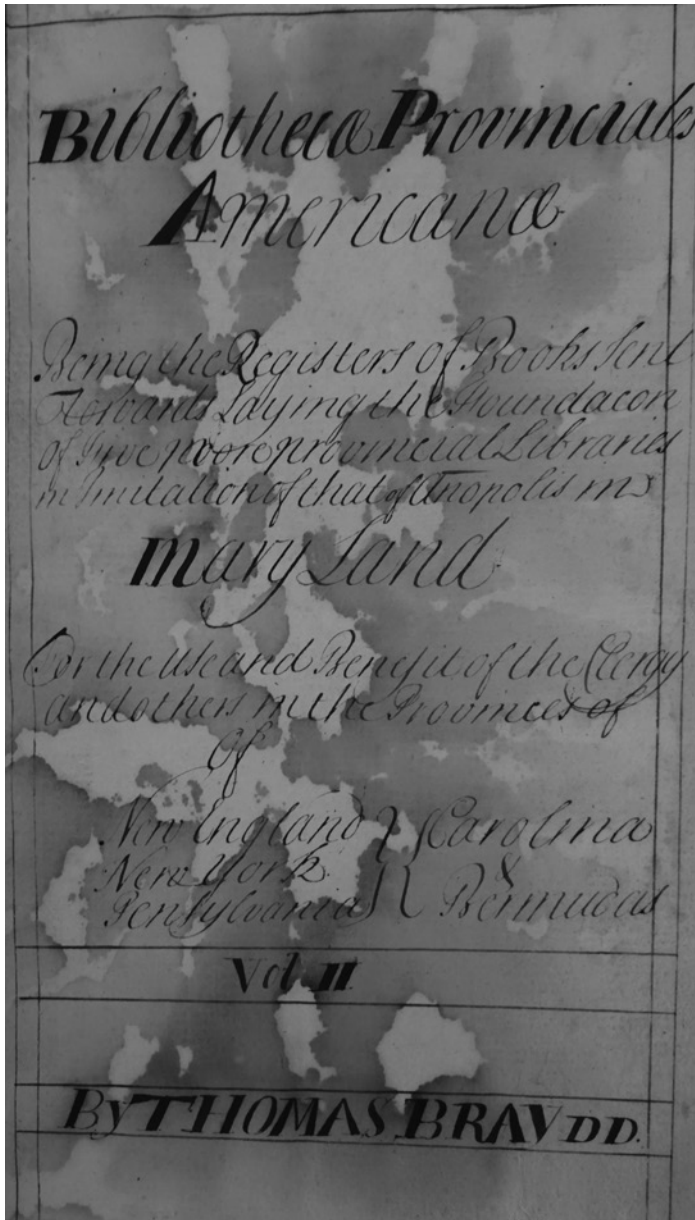


FIGURE 1.1 *Thomas Bray, Bibliothecæ Provinciales Americanæ, USPG Papers, fol. 37, Bodleian Library, Oxford.*

WITH KIND PERMISSION OF THE UNITED SOCIETY OF PARTNERS IN THE GOSPEL, USPG PAPERS IN THE CARE OF THE BODLEIAN LIBRARY.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

were conceived generally as useful references to defend and disseminate the Anglican faith:

- 1) The H. Scriptures & Commentators;
- 2) Fathers & Antient Writers;
- 3) Discourses Apologetical for y<sup>e</sup> Authority of y<sup>e</sup> Script. And y<sup>e</sup> Truth of [Christiani]ty;
- 4) Bodies of Divinity both Catechical & Scholastical;
- 5) On y<sup>e</sup> Gene[ra]l. Doctrine of the Cov[enant] of Grace;
- 6) On y<sup>e</sup> Creed both ye whole Body of Credenda & on particular Articles;
- 7) On Moral Laws & [Christi]an Duties;
- 8) Of Repentance & Mortification;
- 9) Of the Divine Assistance Prayer and y<sup>e</sup> Sacram[en]t those means of performing y<sup>e</sup> foregoing Articles;
- 10) Sermons;
- 11) Ministerial Directories with y<sup>e</sup> Lives of Emin[en]t Divines;
- 12) Controversial;

Books for the laity, which constituted only a few volumes, were chosen to improve what Bray described as the general ignorance and lack of morality of the colonists. The practical volumes were classified as:

- 1) Humanity viz. Ethicks & Oeconomicks;
- 2) Polity and Law;
- 3) History & its appendages Chronology, Geography, Voyages & Travails
- 4) Phisiology, Anatomy, Chirurgy & Medicine;
- 5) Mathematicks & Trade;
- 6) Grammars & Lexicons;
- 7) Rhetorick;
- 8) Logick;
- 9) Poetry;
- 10) Miscellanies.

The carefully designed libraries consisted of 164 volumes sent to Boston in two shipments, 151 to New York, 238 to Philadelphia and similar numbers to St George in Bermuda and Charleston, South Carolina.<sup>52</sup> The catalogues and their contents materialised Bray's reflections on how books and libraries could

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<sup>52</sup> The content of the libraries is detailed in Bernard C. Steiner, 'Rev. Thomas Bray and his American Libraries', *American Historical Review*, 2.1 (Oct 1896), pp. 59–75.

act as spiritual guides. Significantly, Bray proposed that public lending libraries could form the first step towards creating parochial libraries:

Standing Libraries will signifie little in the Country, where Persons must ride some miles to look into a Book, such Journeys being too expensive of Time and Money: but Lending Libraries, which come home to 'em without Charge, may tolerably well supply the vacancies into their own Studies, till such time as these Lending may be improv'd into Parochial Libraries.<sup>53</sup>

Considering mobility as a crucial characteristic of the colonial reader, Bray did not see it as an impediment to the settling of libraries. His "Proposals for the Incouragement of Religion and Learning in the Foreign Plantations" were pragmatic propositions built on the primary assumption that a network of libraries rather than a commercial exchange of books would sustain his imperial missionary ideal. Libraries were considered as spiritual reserves and their form and purpose ought to be adapted to the colonial context. Drawing from his experience in Maryland, Bray considered that borrowing books, rather than owning them, facilitated the circulation of faith. Bray's missionary efforts were devoted to the creation of a prescribed American library. After his death in 1730 a charity, the 'Associates of Dr Bray', continued his endeavours using his own library and its 2,780 books "for founding Parochial Libraries", but also specifically for "converting the Negroes" as was required by the SPG's Royal Charter.<sup>54</sup> The latter had been entirely absent from Bray's original mission.<sup>55</sup> While Bray's first libraries sought to oppose Quakers in the colonies, his Associates turned to Quakers for advice on how to open schools for enslaved Africans. The subject of black schools is not in the purview of this article, but would further reveal the fascinating opposition between Quaker and Anglican practices.

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53 Thomas Bray, *An Essay Towards Promoting All Necessary and Useful Knowledge, Both Divine and Human in All Parts of His Majesty's Dominions, Both at Home and Abroad* (London, 1697).

54 Bray's Associate MS, vol. F. 1a. The library is catalogued (pp. 1–12) and contains some titles in 400 copies. The value of the books and their destinations are also listed (pp. 13–80).

55 Edgar L. Pennington, 'Dr. Thomas Bray's Associates and Their Work among the Negroes', *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, 48 (1938), pp. 311–403; John C. van Horne (ed.), *Religious Philanthropy and Colonial Slavery: The American Correspondence of the Associates of Dr. Bray, 1717–1777* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985). For the foundation of Bray's Associates, see the Bray's Associate MS, 'Minutes of the Meetings of the Trustees for Instructing Negroes in the Christian religion', vol. F. 1a, fol. ii.

The SPG was framed as a transatlantic enterprise. Relaying information concerning the colonies and plantations to the metropolis was equally essential and accounts and maps of the advancement of religion in the provinces were commissioned. Again, a standard library was created to fulfil this purpose. Founding member of the society Revd White Kennett (1660–1728), created a *Bibliothecae Americanae Primordia* that he donated to the SPG. His aim was to inform London readers and inspire merchants and ministers to take on the colonial venture. In the 219-page catalogue of his donation, Kennett explains that he first started the collection when he was writing up his account of the SPG: “My Curiosity by degrees encreas’d the little Stock, and brought me in a tolerable Connexion of Books and Papers”.<sup>56</sup>

Composed of volumes that would inform metropolitan readers of the natural, religious and ethnographic composition of the American colonies, Kennett’s library sought to mend an original imbalance in the SPG, in perfect dissymmetry with the Quakers: “We took more care of others abroad, than our selves at home”, Kennett wrote, “and had sent over several little Libraries for the Use of our Missionaries, and their People in those distant Parts, before we thought of providing for our own nearer Accommodation”.<sup>57</sup> His plan was therefore to constitute in London an ideal library about the Americas touching on every subject. Such a universal library would bridge intellectually and spiritually the Anglican community across the Atlantic. This carefully laid out “literary bank”, as Kennett called it, was intended as the best ally in the imperial expansion of Britain:

The Truth is, for any single Person to undertake the founding a complete Library, requires a Genius, as well as a Fortune, above the common sort of Mankind, a BODLEY, a TENISON or some such superiour Spirit of Piety, Learning and Liberality.

However, as the drawing of one Furrow was formerly the Designation of a City, so I hope this rude Draught may direct a little to the raising furnishing and endowing, a full and perfect AMERICAN LIBRARY, to

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56 White Kennett, *Bibliothecae Americanae Primordia*. *An attempt towards laying the foundation of an American library, in several books, papers and writings, humbly given to the society for the propagation of the gospel in Foreign Parts, for the perpetual use and benefit of their members, their missionaries, friends, correspondents, and others concern’d in the Good design of Planting and promoting Christianity within her majesties colonies and plantations in the west-indies* (London: printed for J. Churchill, at the Black Swan in Pater-Noster Row, 1713), p. ii.

57 Kennett, *Bibliothecae Americanae Primordia*, p. iii.

contain all sorts of Books, Charts, Maps, Globes, Instruments, and other Ustensils, that can possibly tend to the more exact Survey and Knowledge of the Earth and Seas, and Heavenly Bodies; and to be more especially stock'd with such Discourses, Letters, Journals, and other Instructions, as may best serve for the Conduct of our Missionaries, the help of Mariners and Merchants, the Information of Strangers, and the entertainment of all Persons, who wish well to the Propagation of our Faith, and to the Trade and Commerce of our Country, among ALL NATIONS.<sup>58</sup>

This brief examination of the Quaker and Anglican transatlantic libraries opened with a reference to the Evangelical movement to indicate that each denomination attempted, more or less successfully, to establish a transatlantic library. The Quaker and Anglican examples demonstrate opposing models. Whereas the Quakers benefited from efficient trading links with the colonies and a centralised repository library in London, they did not organise in a systematic way their local libraries in the colonies. The book culture developed by British Quakers was passed on across the Atlantic and transformed in its new cultural context. Blurring the meanings of private ownership, the community dissolved its stock of books into private repositories, where volumes were in turn, shared. On the other hand, Anglican charitable societies were designed purposefully to create and furnish a network of established libraries in the colonies. This resulted very directly from the vision of one man, Thomas Bray, and was developed primarily to counter the threat presented by Quaker influence in the colonies. As Bray pointed, the colonies were points of contact and its inhabitants were characterised by their mobility. In concordance with its doctrine and ethos, the prescribed Anglican lending library offered to its readers an all-inclusive package, while Quaker institutions supported the circulation of their authors' works but did not establish reading guides or communal reading places in the colonies, relying on the will of private Friends.<sup>59</sup> These examples embody "the purposeful reading" of the colonists as a dynamic act shaped directly by the religious community surrounding the reader.<sup>60</sup>

58 Kennett, *Bibliothecae Americanae Primordia*, p. iv.

59 A different case could be made within the purview of the London Second Day Morning Meeting, which established systems of control of the works published and distributed to London Friends. Evidence of censorship within the Quaker community has been ignored by many scholars of the movement, as its effects were dissolved by the reality of practices. In her ongoing doctoral work, Brooke Palmieri, UCL, examines these instances of censorship.

60 Louis B. Wright, 'The Purposeful Reading of our Colonial Ancestors', *Journal of English Literary History*, 4.2 (June 1937), pp. 85–111.

## Poetry and Civic Urbanism in the Coffee-House Library in the Mid-Eighteenth Century

Markman Ellis

The eighteenth-century coffee-house is widely known as a location for free, open, critical and rational debate. This construction of the coffee-house was one that was repeatedly advanced and criticised in publications in the period, albeit in differing registers, that range from Ned Ward's *London Spy* (1698–1700) to *The Spectator* (1711–12). The account was revived and defended again in the nineteenth century, in British historical writing by Thomas Babington Macaulay and Leslie Stephens,<sup>1</sup> and perhaps most influentially, it has been restated in the distorting lens of the historical digression on coffee-houses in the third chapter of Jürgen Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.<sup>2</sup> The diverse articulations of this construction have in common a view of the coffee-house as primarily a place of talk and conversation, open to a capaciously varied clientele, where news and ideas could be discussed and debated, and judgements and opinions formed and revised.

Coffee-houses were a predominantly urban phenomenon, and first opened in London in the 1650s, before spreading within a decade along trade and information routes to provincial centres, including Oxford, Cambridge, Bristol, Norwich, Edinburgh and Dublin. Their close affiliation with cultures of commerce and news dissemination placed them at the centre of the British model of trade and empire. Across the Atlantic in the British colonies in North America, the coffee-house replicated the London model, attracting a high-status

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- 1 Thomas Babington Macaulay, *The History of England from the Accession of James the Second*, 4 vols. (London: Longman, Browne, Green and Longmans, 1849–1855), i. 366–70; Leslie Stephen, *English Literature and Society in the Eighteenth Century: Ford Lectures, 1903* (London: Duckworth and Co., 1904), pp. 5, 37, 39.
  - 2 Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, (Darmstadt and Neuwied: Hermann Luchterhand Verlag, 1962); *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: Polity, 1992). On the historiography of the coffee-house see Markman Ellis, 'General Introduction', *Eighteenth-Century Coffee-House Culture*, 4 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2006), i. [xii–xxiv].

clientele in search of coffee, companionship, commerce and communications.<sup>3</sup> The first coffee-house opened in Boston in 1670, before the first in Paris, Vienna or Venice, after the Town Council issued a license to Dorothy Jones and Jane Barnard “to keepe a house of publique Entertainment for the sellinge of Coffee & Chucullettoe”.<sup>4</sup> Coffee-houses in Boston, New York and Philadelphia became significant centres for gentility, merchants and the commercial spirit, as David Shields has argued.<sup>5</sup>

Coffee-houses in the London model, whether in the metropolitan provinces or in North America, were renowned for their facilitation of conversation and information exchange. Although talk is the dominant model of this coffee-house interaction, scholars have noted that reading and writing were also important. Coffee-houses were long recognised for their provision of newspapers and periodicals, and as such some recent accounts have celebrated them as sites of reading and print culture.<sup>6</sup> In fact, coffee-house patrons were able to encounter a wide variety of printed and manuscript material in coffee-houses, extending well beyond the quotidian appetite for ‘news’. The provision of printed and material reading matter in the coffee-room was indeed a characteristic aspect of London coffee-houses. John Macky (d. 1726), a Scottish travel-writer and government agent, observed the lively print culture of London coffee-houses in 1714: “in all the *Coffee-Houses* you have not only the *Foreign* Prints, but several *English* ones with the *Foreign* Occurrences, besides Papers of Morality and Party-Disputes”.<sup>7</sup> In Macky’s view, coffee-houses offered their clientele a print diet that not only included newspapers, but extended further to political and moral pamphlets. In America too, the coffee-house

3 Markman Ellis, *The Coffee-House: A Cultural History* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2004); Brian Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005).

4 *A 7th Report of the Record Commissioners of the City of Boston containing the Boston Records from 1660 to 1701* (Boston, MA: Rockwell and Churchill, 1881), 30 November 1670, p. 58.

5 David Shields, *Civil Tongues & Polite Letters in British America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), pp. 55–65. See also Michael Eamon, *Imprinting Britain: Newspapers, Sociability, and the Shaping of British North America* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2015), which is particularly focused on coffee-houses and print in Quebec City and Halifax.

6 Joad Raymond, ‘The Newspaper, Public Opinion, and the Public Sphere in the Seventeenth Century’, in Joad Raymond (ed.), *News, Newspapers and Society in Early Modern Britain* (London: Frank Cass, 1999), pp. 109–40; Helen Berry, *Gender, Society and Print Culture in Late-Stuart England: The Cultural World of the ‘Athenian Mercury’* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 11–34.

7 John Macky, *A Journey Through England. In Familiar Letters* (London: J. Roberts for T. Caldecott, 1714), pp. 107, 111.

and print culture were coincident. In September 1690 in Boston, an enterprising puritan bookseller Benjamin Harris gained a license to retail coffee from a house near the Town House on King Street, an enterprise he named the London Coffee House.<sup>8</sup> Before he had emigrated to Massachusetts, Harris had kept a bookshop in Sweeting's Rents in London, a lane next to the Royal Exchange that was home to several coffee-houses. Here he had learnt the powerful combination of coffee, commerce and print. As a bookseller in Boston he retailed books imported from London, and published almanacs and other popular titles, which he sold from a counter in the London Coffee House. In September 1690 he started a monthly newspaper (also a first in the American colonies) called *Public Occurrences*, which the Governor suppressed soon after as unlicensed.<sup>9</sup> Although Harris's London Coffee-House was only in business for a few years, the model he promoted, fusing coffee, print and debate, became firmly established in the North American colonies. As Michael Eamon observes, in the late eighteenth-century, coffee-houses in Canada, in the British colonies of Quebec and Nova Scotia, routinely "carried newspapers, magazines and other print items", and were "perceived as places for the distribution of print in such various formats as correspondence, handbills, pamphlets and essays".<sup>10</sup>

In an article published in *The Library* in 2009, I argued that some coffee-houses did more than carry newspapers, pamphlets and books for reading and discussion in the coffee-room. In addition, they developed and maintained extensive collections of printed material, collected for subscribing members, and regulated by rudimentary forms of organisation, allowing for storage and retrieval.<sup>11</sup> When Paul Kaufman examined this topic in the 1960s, he described them as "reading centres",<sup>12</sup> but I argued that they constituted an important, if overlooked, form of community library for the eighteenth-century city. The evidence assessed in this article was partly anecdotal, from accounts by library users, but also comprised data and analysis about the pamphlets, books and other publications actually present in the coffee-houses. The data was derived from provenance endorsements indicating that the book or pamphlet had been owned by a coffee-house: these endorsements sometimes provided additional

8 *Boston Records 1660–1701*, pp. 204, 207.

9 George Emery Littlefield, *Early Boston Booksellers, 1642–1711* (Boston: The Club of Odd Volumes, 1900), pp. 148–64.

10 Eamon, *Imprinting Britain*, pp. 174–75.

11 Markman Ellis, 'Coffee-house Libraries in Mid-Eighteenth-Century London', *The Library*, 10.1 (March 2009), pp. 3–40.

12 Paul Kaufman, 'Coffee Houses as Reading Centres', *Libraries and their Users: Collected Papers in Library History* (London: The Library Association, 1969), pp. 115–26. See also George S. McCue, 'Libraries of the London Coffee-Houses', *Library Quarterly*, 4.4 (1934), pp. 624–27.



evidence in the form of a date of acquisition, a collection number and a list of subscribers. For example, a copy in the British Library of James Miller's long poem *Art of Life: In Imitation of Horace's Art of Poetry*, published by J. Watts in October 1739, is endorsed in ink at the top of the titlepage "Toms Coffee House" and dated 31 October 1739 (see Figure 2.1). It is numbered "No: 134" and in the

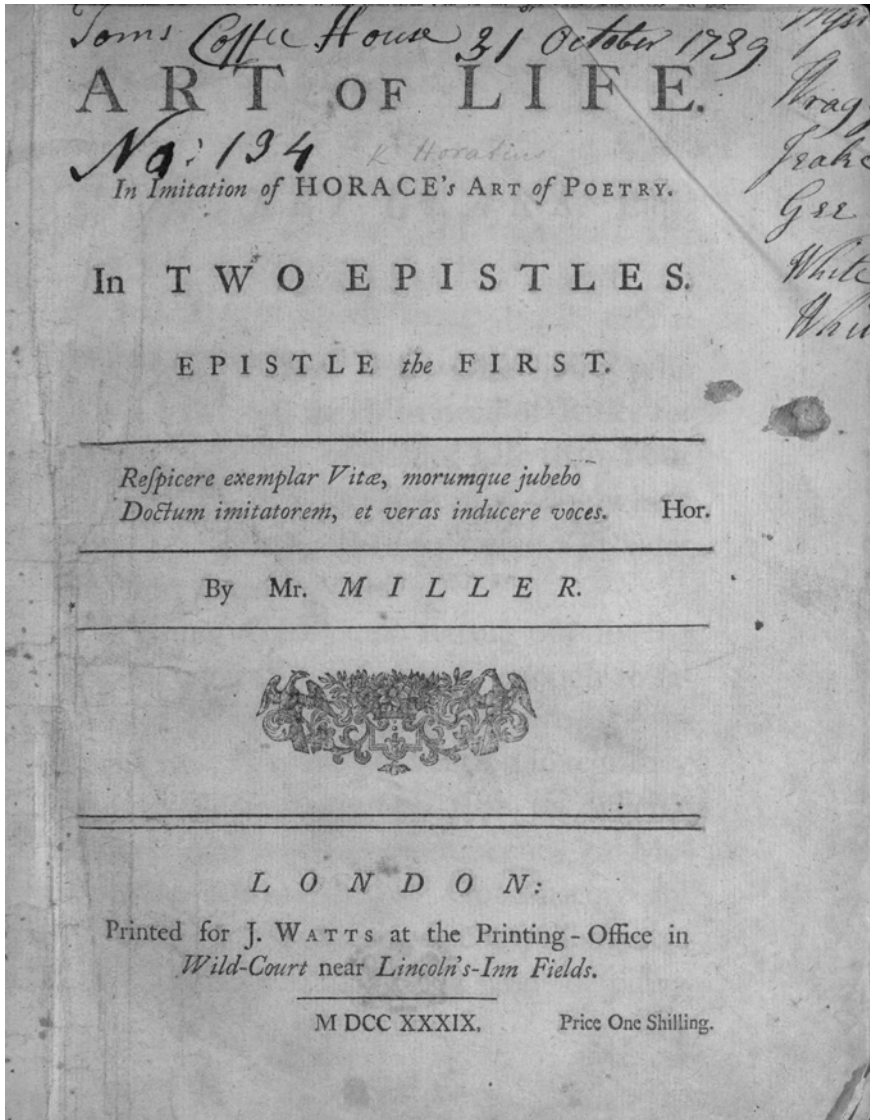


FIGURE 2.1 Titlepage with coffee-house endorsement; James Miller, *Art of Life. In Imitation of Horace's Art of Poetry. In Two Epistles. The first epistle. By Mr. Miller*, (London: J. Watts, 1739), 27 pp., 4°. ESTC T22458.  
© BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD: POEMS: 11630.C.10.(1).

right margin is a list of five names, partially cropped, listing Messrs Wragg, Jeake, Gee, White and “Whit[...].”<sup>13</sup>

The essay in *The Library* examined 395 items with coffee-house endorsements, and identified evidence for more than twenty coffee-house libraries, mostly in London, but also in Oxford and Cambridge. Since 2009, a further fifty items with coffee-house provenance have come to light, giving a total of 445 books, pamphlets and other printed material (see Table 2.1). The additional items are a broadly similar mix of pamphlets and short books, on a broadly contiguous range of topics, and including poetry, as well as sermons, tracts, plays, essay periodicals, and prose satires. Of the fifty new findings, there are three bound volumes that contain groups of pamphlets: (i) thirteen sermons in a made-up volume in St John’s College Library in Cambridge that belonged to the Master of Arts Coffee-House (also in Cambridge) in the 1790s;<sup>14</sup> (ii) a volume of nine plays in the State Library of South Australia in Adelaide which belonged to Bamford’s Coffee House in Ipswich in the 1750s; and (iii) six issues of Bonnell Thornton’s essay periodical *Have at You All* (1752) at The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio, which belonged to Tom’s Coffee House in Devereux Court, London.<sup>15</sup> The plays from Bamford’s are especially notable because they were collected into a bound volume by the coffee-house: not only does each volume have a title page endorsement, but the volume itself has a fore-edge inscription in the same hand. This seems to indicate that the plays were collected separately as they appeared, and were then bound up into a volume that was itself part of the coffee-house collection.

The coffee-house library emerged as a phenomenon in London in the 1730s, and if the provenance evidence is an accurate indication, was largely eclipsed by the late 1760s – although there is some evidence from the 1790s, notably relating to Oxford and Cambridge, that suggests an enduring but minor after-life. Some provincial coffee-houses, such as Bamford’s in Ipswich, also maintained libraries, but evidence of any distinct forms in provincial coffee-house libraries is not forthcoming. In the North American colonies, David Shields has demonstrated how coffee-houses supported and encouraged cultures of news distribution and the circulation of print materials, including literature. One example he gives is of Archibald Home, who in 1733 or 1734 circulated a manuscript satire in a coffee-house in New York City: a mock-memoir

13 James Miller, *Art of Life. In Imitation of Horace’s Art of Poetry. In Two Epistles. The first epistle. By Mr. Miller* (London: J. Watts, 1739), 27pp., 4°, British Library copy [hereafter, BL], Poems: 11630.c.10.(1), ESTCT22458.

14 I am grateful to Kathryn McKee for this information.

15 I am grateful to David Brewer for this information.

TABLE 2.1 *Coffee-House endorsement titles [updated 2015]: Analysis of collection by writing medium (number/percentage rounded).*

	Verse	Prose	Drama	Music	Map	Total
All coffee-houses in data	211 (47%)	214 (48%)	16 (4%)	2 (>1%)	3 (1%)	446
Tom's Coffee-House	161	124	4	1	1	291
George's Coffee-House	17	3				20
Bank Coffee-House	2	17	1			20
Roberson's Coffee-House		15	1			16
Master of Arts Coffee-house		14				14
Bamford's Coffee-House		3	8			11
New Exchange Coffee-House	8					8
Other	23	38	2	1	2	66

burlesquing the popular genre of the criminal biography.<sup>16</sup> It is clear that coffee-houses in the American colonies had many of the same features as those in the metropolis: a polite regime, the rhetoric of openness and egalitarianism, association with discussion, with news and with belles lettres.<sup>17</sup> As they did in London, colonial coffee-houses routinely offered newspapers, periodicals, and pamphlets to their clientele, even if, as Richard Brown argues, conversation and correspondence were more significant methods of disseminating news.<sup>18</sup>

16 Archibald Home, 'Memoirs of a Handspike', in *Poems on Several Occasions*, Laing Manuscripts III, 452, University of Edinburgh Library. See David Shields, 'Eighteenth-Century Literary Culture', in Hugh Amory and David D. Hall (eds.), *A History of the Book in America Volume 1* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), p. 447.

17 Shields, *Civil Tongues*.

18 Richard D. Brown, *Knowledge is Power: The Diffusion of Information in Early America, 1700–1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 114–16.

However, there is no extant evidence that any North American coffee-houses had libraries: no anecdotal evidence, and no provenance evidence.

Although the new data extends the number of distinct coffee-house collections of books to twenty-five, nonetheless approximately eighty-five percent of the data concern six coffee-houses, and sixty-five percent concern just one, Tom's Coffee-House in Devereux Court. Another notable observation is the high proportion of titles in verse (forty-seven percent), this when the proportion of poetry in the general market for print has been estimated at between 4.5 and 10.5 percent.<sup>19</sup> That reading and discussing poetry was central to the coffee-house sociability of this and other coffee-houses was one of the more curious conclusions of the 2009 essay: to twenty-first century readers, poetry can seem a long way from the quotidian concerns of newspaper-reading coffee-drinkers – though perhaps not so far to scholars of minor eighteenth-century poetry and its reading cultures. This chapter is a contribution to further understanding of poetry and coffee-houses in eighteenth-century London by closely examining some aspects of the library at Tom's Coffee-House in Devereux Court, asking how the culture of poetry reading casts light on the self-conception of the coffee-house, both as a reading community, and self reflexively, as a participant institution in polite civil society.

### On the Poetry in the Tom's Coffee-House Collection

There were numerous businesses named Tom's Coffee-House in eighteenth-century London. The one that is the subject of this chapter was in Devereux Court, an alley leading off the Strand near Temple Bar. With its substantial library of books, pamphlets and newspapers, it was an important venue in the city's literary and scientific sphere. It was founded in 1706 by Thomas Twining, and continued to be owned by the Twining family throughout the century. Twinings, a tea marketing conglomerate now part of a multinational food and drink corporation, still operate a retail shop at the location, although the building has been rebuilt several times in between. In the eighteenth century, it comprised a coffee-room, kitchen, coffee-roastery, and a shop for retail sales of coffee and tea. The business offered a range of further services including, by the mid-century, banking.<sup>20</sup> Devereux Court was a relatively modern pedestrian-only

19 Michael F. Suarez, 'Towards a Bibliometric Analysis of the Surviving Record', in Michael F. Suarez and Michael L. Turner (eds.) *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, Volume 5: 1695–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 48.

20 Stephen H. Twining, *The House of Twining, 1706–1956* (London: R. Twining, 1956), pp. 4–13.

alley built by the property speculator Nicholas If-Jesus-Christ-Had-Not-Died-For-Thee-Thou-Hadst-Been-Damned Barbon to provide shopping amenities, legal offices, and housing close to Middle Temple. It was at the centre of an area known for intellectual activities, and was the home to law students, lawyers, writers, scribes, and the ancillary trades of gentlemen (barbers, perfumers, wig-makers, dancing masters, toy-sellers and so forth). Tom's had some notice as a place where poets, wits and natural philosophers assembled, though it was not as well known for this as George's and the Grecian, two coffee-houses also in Devereux Court less than twenty yards away in either direction.

There are 291 works with coffee-house provenance from Tom's, of which 161 (fifty-five percent) are verse, while prose constitutes forty-three percent and drama two percent.<sup>21</sup> Focusing the analysis on the poetry, it is possible to discriminate between its formal allegiance, for example between formal verse satire, pastoral or georgic. Such an analysis comes with the caveat that eighteenth-century verse forms are not stable, and so determining the verse form of each item involves an element of critical judgement, especially around mixed and heterogeneous verse experiments such as mock heroic and burlesque. Given these caveats, of the 161 items of verse with Tom's provenance, at least eighty-seven are satire in various forms (fifty-four percent), including translations of classical satire. The remainder have significant numbers of panegyrics on contemporary figures (eleven percent) and descriptive and philosophical verse (nine percent), as well as smaller groups of ballads, elegies, pastorals and verse epistles, with a tail comprised of the miscellaneous, mixed, minor or undetermined. The prevalence of satire in the verse is reinforced by various forms of prose satire (twenty-nine further items), including essay periodicals in the mode of *The Spectator*, although the majority of the prose items are short pamphlets or tracts on issues of contemporary debate.

The poetry in the Tom's Coffee-House library can also be interrogated by asking what the poems themselves suggest about coffee-houses, sociability and the city. The poems in the collection are many and varied, but a substantial number reflect on the particular cultural locus of the coffee-house and its habitués. In this way, it might be said that the library helps establish for Tom's Coffee-house its own ideology, one that is closely embedded in notions of gentlemanly behaviour in urban contexts. Titles in the coffee-house library include John Arbuthnot's *Know Your Self* (1734), a philosophical poem that contrasts the poverty of material existence with the mysteries of imagination and

21 Among the fifty new discoveries, there are seven items with Tom's provenance, thereby diluting the percentage of Tom's material in the whole database from seventy-two to sixty-five percent of the total evidence: all the new Tom's items are prose.

faith; Thomas Catesby Pagett's *An Essay on Human Life* (1734), an imitation of Pope on the folly of pride, power and riches; Francis Manning's *Of Business and Retirement* (1735), a satire on ambition, avarice and the rise to wealth and power of City merchants; Aaron Hill's *The Tears of the Muses* (1737), a satire on the follies of modern society; Richard Glover's *London: Or, The Progress of Commerce* (1739), a long descriptive poem on the origin and progress of commerce, which reaches its climax in London; Patrick Guthrie's *Candour* (1739), a satire on the abuse of eloquence; Benjamin Parker's *Money* (1740), an imitation of Milton in blank verse, that charts the origin and influence of money; William Shenstone's *The Judgment of Hercules* (1741), a narrative poem describing the choice Alcides makes between the path of virtue and of vice; James Fortescue's *A Poetical Essay on the Equal Distribution of Happiness among Mankind* (1746), a philosophical poem; and Timothy Brecknock's gentle mock-heroic account of a fop's day-time amusements amongst the fashionable resorts of the town, called *The Important Triflers. A Satire: Set Forth in a Journal of Pastime a-la mode, among Young People of Fashion in the Spring-Season of the Year* (1748). Most of this poetry is from the wider gentlemanly culture of poetry writing, rather than of the celebrated and canonical. There are some poems by poets whose work is still found in anthologies and university curricula, notably Pope, but also Hill, Shenstone, Dodsley, Duck, and Arbuthnot. But most of the extant poems are from much less well known poets: competent and practiced members of the poetry writing public, who wrote verses typical of the forms and ambitions of the age.

Like much eighteenth-century poetry, these poems were published in pamphlet form (short, unbound, stitched publications of less than thirty-two pages).<sup>22</sup> The brevity of the pamphlet form, it might be assumed, facilitated the consumption of these publications in the hurry and hubbub of the coffee-room. The majority are quartos (fifty-four percent) or folios (forty-three percent), most are between eight and twenty-four pages (the longest 147 pages, the average twenty-six pages). But they are not simply occasional or light verse. Their publication in pamphlet form should not mask the fact that they are also ambitious, difficult and serious poems. They indicate a serious, even studious side to coffee-house reading, one not only governed by distraction or simple entertainment. Some caveats need to be drawn about the data of course: first, this is a considered selection of data, not simply a statistical analysis of the whole dataset. It might be objected that the selection is arbitrary, or worse, actively biased; the selection is not reinforced by extra evidence that indicates these pamphlets

22 Joad Raymond, 'What is a Pamphlet', in *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 4–26.

were read with more particular attention than any other, or were otherwise favoured or thought of as expressing a coherent philosophical outlook, or even that they constituted a group. Nonetheless, it is true that we know these books were present in this coffee-house, available to these men, in this way.

### Coffee-House Verse Forms

The question addressed in the remaining portion of this chapter is the extent to which this group of poetry pamphlets point to the interests of the collective reading community of the coffee-house. Examining the poetry collection as a group, what follows explores some of its key verse forms, satirical modes and tropes. The distinct nature of these coffee-house poems suggests that the activity of making this collection represents particular cultural attitudes of a group of gentlemen linked to Tom's Coffee-House in Devereux Court. The clientele of the library, as revealed by the subscriber names, were often gentlemen of the law and men of learning, both classically educated and comparatively well off. Of the poems in the Tom's Coffee-House library, sixty-nine (forty-three percent) have subscriber endorsements, predominantly lists of five names, many of which are cropped or otherwise illegible. This group generates over 300 names, of which a few are present repeatedly: Davies, White, Wragg, Gouldham and Weaver are all mentioned nine times or more, sometimes in combination. One of these was Charles White (d. 1754), gentleman, admitted on 18 April 1732 to the Middle Temple. He was listed on thirteen poem endorsements, once including his first name: he was a subscriber to Miller's *Art of Life* (1739) and Parker's *Money* (1740), for example, in 1739 and 1740. Another was William Wragg or Wragge (1714–77), the son of a prosperous South Carolina merchant, who also subscribed to Miller and thirteen other poems. Born in South Carolina, Wragg attended Westminster School, St. Johns College Oxford and the Middle Temple (admitted 23 November 1733). He practiced law in London until 1750, when he returned to Charleston, where he owned at least three slave-holding rice plantations.<sup>23</sup> These men are typical of their kind: educated, urban, wealthy, legally trained, and sophisticated.

The coffee-house readers in Tom's were a group that seems to have been especially interested in poetry reading, and it was their taste that shaped the library. This is shown in three significant kinds of poems prominent in the collection, each of which the chapter will explore in further detail: (i) Horatian

23 Robert M. Weir, 'Wragg, William' in *American National Biography Online*, <<http://www.anb.org/articles/01/01-01012.html>>, accessed 7 November 2015.

satire; (ii) town satire; and (iii) civic didactic verse. These are elastic and overlapping categories in some sense, and comprise in total something like forty-nine pamphlet poems (that is, forty-nine of 161 poems – thirty percent – of 291 items in Tom's, of 445 items with coffee-house provenance (eleven percent)). This group of poems has a significant bias towards a particular discursive formation, identified here as 'civic urbanism', a form of gentlemanly self-fashioning that privileged polite forms of urban behaviour and sociability, reinforcing the community of the coffee-house that hosted the library. The library and these poems were not unique in adopting this discursive formation – additional evidence for civic urbanism might also be found in diverse configurations in the theatre, in periodical essays and in the associational world of clubs and scientific institutions. But the active cultivation of civic urbanism in and through neoclassical verse forms collected in the alembic of a coffee-house library concentrated the matter to an unusual degree, and gave it self-reflexive identity.

### (i) *Horatian Satire*

There is a noticeable concentration of imitations and translations of named satires and epistles by Horace. These include Pope's celebrated imitation of the first and second satire of the second book of Horace, published together in 1734,<sup>24</sup> alongside less well-known imitations by William Pulteney, George Ogle and William Melmoth.<sup>25</sup> The imitation of Horatian satire is of course a specific mode of writing, but it also represents an attitude to urban society, a gentle and subtle form of satire, which drew polite attention to social follies and peccadilloes in order that they might be reformed – in contrast to the Juvenalian mode of railing against the particular moral failings and corruption of named individuals. Horace is in many senses a most felicitous classical poet for the period. Horace and eighteenth-century gentlemanly culture were closely engaged, as they would be for the next century or so, as is seen in school

24 *The First Satire of the Second Book of Horace Imitated in Dialogue between Alexander Pope of Twickenham, in Com' Mid' Esq; and his Learned Council. To which is added, The Second Satire of the same Book, By the same hand. Never before Printed* (London: L.G. [Lawton Gilliver], 1734), BL, Poems: 11630.c.10.(6).

25 William Pulteney, Earl of Bath, *An Ode, Imitated from Ode XI, Book 2d. of Horace* (London: W. Webb, 1745); George Ogle, *Epistle of Horace Imitated. And Illustrated with Gems and Medals* (London: W. Wilkins in Lombard Street, 1735); George Ogle, *Third Epistle of First Book of Horace Imitated* (London: R. Dodsley, 1738); George Ogle, *The Twelfth Epistle of the First Book of Horace Imitated* (London: R. Dodsley [1739]); William Melmoth, *Two Epistles of Horace Imitated* (London: T. Cooper, 1736).



and university curricula, for example.<sup>26</sup> Horace was constructed as the finest expression of a set of cultural attitudes that were polite, leisured, elite, moralising and male, and as such, established as an ideal for the eighteenth-century educated man of letters. His style, especially its grace, sprightliness, lightness, ease, pleasantness, all made the Horatian mode especially valued. As Reuben Brower argues, Horace was a kind of “cultural hero” for the period:

The essayists of the *Spectator* and the *Tatler* and similar periodicals were like Pope writing with Horace over their shoulder. Their literary style, their conception of their function as polite educators, their picture of good life in town and country, are further signs of the effect of Horace's example.<sup>27</sup>

Brower suggests that Augustans saw in Horace's poetry a concentrated image of a life and civilisation to which they more or less consciously aspired, and although this was always only an aspiration and an argument, it was often not supported by a close engagement with Horace's own work. Dryden's distinctions between Horatian and Juvenalian satire were used “by most eighteenth-century observers” of contemporary poetry (argues John Sitter), although the distinctions drawn between the two classical writers to characterise verse represented “both authors at their extremes”.<sup>28</sup> Howard Weinbrot in particular has argued that this vision of a cosy Horatianism, as he calls it, is often overstated. Many eighteenth-century readers recognised that, as a satirist, Horace was a court poet, cringing before and flattering the tyrant Augustus, and as such found the alternative model offered by Juvenal's lashing satire more attractive.<sup>29</sup>

An example of Horatian satire in the Tom's Coffee-House library is Miller's *Art of Life*, noted above.<sup>30</sup> Like Miller's earlier *Harlequin Horace* (1736), which was a satiric inversion of Horace's *Art of Poetry*, the *Art of Life* was an unorthodox imitation of Horace's poetics, making the contrast between the two works

26 Stephen Harrison, ‘Horace and the Construction of the English Victorian Gentleman’, *Helios*, 34.2 (2007), pp. 207–22.

27 Reuben Brower, ‘The Image of Horace’, in *Alexander Pope: The Poetry of Allusion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), pp. 163–87, at p. 163.

28 John Sitter, ‘Formal Verse Satire’, in *The Cambridge Introduction to Eighteenth-Century Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 95.

29 Howard D. Weinbrot, ‘History, Horace, and Augustus Caesar: Some Implications for Eighteenth-Century Satire’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 7.4 (1974), pp. 391–414, at pp. 407–09.

30 Miller, *Art of Life*.

clear though its presentation as a parallel text with Miller's verses on the verso in rhymed pentameter, opposite Horace's *Art of Poetry* in Latin on the opposite recto page. Miller's dedication describes the poem as "Rules for the Conduct of Life". It imagines a reader who is

A young Gentleman setting out in the World, with a Fortune ample enough to satiate the greatest Profusion of Youth, or Avarice of Old Age, and yet steering so regularly betwixt those Extremes, that 'tis difficult to determine whether Munificence or Moderation, Good-sense or Good-nature are his most distinguishing Accomplishments.

The poem proposes to attack those "false Tastes which opulent Youth is so generally Heir to" and to champion "a universal Simplicity and Decorum in Manners, Conversation and Dress".<sup>31</sup> The poem includes portraits – generally hostile – of important figures in the London cultural scene, mixed with advice and guidance for the young gentleman in the conduct-book tradition. The speaker criticises ostentatious display in a variety of cultural fields, including landscape gardening, grand tours, coaches and dress, especially for those with limited finances. The poet urges his pupil to choose a career suitable to his genius; to act appropriately when in public for each place or host; to dress in simple decent clothes, made from British textiles; to avoid extreme positions in debates on affairs of state, especially in Parliament. The "safest way" is the "Medium", the poet suggests, avoiding "Discordance, Folly, Tumult, Babble; Proving, Defending, Jangling, Wrangling all".<sup>32</sup>

## (ii) *Town Satires*

A further set of satires on urban life extends the Horatian model beyond imitation to something more like influence. William Kenrick's long verse satire *The Town* (1748) assesses the state of literature and its typical modes of sociability, including a long section detailing the court writers who flocked to the St James's Coffee-House. Robert Potter's *Retirement: An Epistle* (1758), an attack on pedants, critics, place-seekers, sycophants, greed and avarice, had the distinction of being in the collections of both Tom's and George's.<sup>33</sup> This sort of writing has the capacity to inflate itself to a discourse of moral self-fashioning. Although the coffee-house was not always a location for polite and reasonable behaviour, this body of texts represented it in that way.

<sup>31</sup> Miller, *Art of Life*, p. [iii]–[iv].

<sup>32</sup> Miller, *Art of Life*, pp. 4–12, 22–24.

<sup>33</sup> Robert Potter, *Retirement: An Epistle*. By Mr. Potter (London: Paul Vaillant, 1758), 23pp., 4°.

Like *The Spectator*, these moral verse essays consciously depict the polite reformation of society, casting the coffee-house as the location of introspective social observation, a home to high status neo-classical philosophising, in which a socially-exclusive group of men might discuss in polite and genteel surroundings the high-minded ideals of their own interest or status group. The books in the library, in other words, shape the kinds of social behaviour expected in the coffee-room, and provide a kind of picture of how men, even critics, might live together, might conduct themselves and enjoy the art of conversation.

William Kenrick's *The Town* (1748) satirises the follies and vices of London high society, including the theatres, masquerades and assemblies of wits at booksellers shops and coffee-houses. The poet attacks the fashionable coffee-houses in St James's: first the "Fools and Coxcombs in a higher Sphere" who gather at White's Chocolate House in St James's Street, where, he says, Rakes, Beaux, "Lords and Knights fill up the crowded Room". He then crosses the street to the St James's Coffee-House, directly opposite the Palace, where his satire observes how hireling writers obsequiously seek preferment from courtiers and men of influence.

Perchance some Lord your Verses may receive.  
 And when they've Money, Lords, you know, can give.  
 Besides, there's some may boast a good pretence,  
 However strange it seem, to Wit and Sense.  
 Well, Sir, suppose your just Assertion true,  
 That some Great Man is near as wise as you;  
 If 'mongst the Fools, \* St James's constant guest  
 How shall we know to mark him from the rest?  
 But think not I wou'd e'er so meanly serve,  
 Shew Verses to my Lord, then hope and starve:  
 Such be the Fate of ev'ry rhiming Fool  
 Who learn'd to pen his wretched Lines at School.<sup>34</sup>

\*St James's Coffee-house

Attacking the "Dull Asses! Void of Genius or of Thought" who "write (so Parrots prate) as once they're taught", he condemns a series of fashionably sententious works of verse philosophy: *The Resurrection. A Poem. In Three Parts* (1747), written by Hugh Blair and George Bannatyne, and published under

34 William Kenrick, *The Town. A Satire* (London: R. Griffiths, 1748), 24pp., 4°, pp. 11–12, BL, Poems: 11630.c.9.(4). Endorsed: "Toms Coffee House March 22 1748 /Devereux Cou[rt]".

the name “William Douglas” by Strahan and Dodsley, amongst others; James Ruffhead’s *The Passions of Man. A poem. In four epistles* (1746); and *The Solitary. An Ode. Inscrib’d to Ralph Allen, esq; of Bath* (1747). Kenrick’s *Dunciad*-inspired visions – “What loads of Paper destin’d to the Press / To bear the dull Impressions of an Ass” – condemns the vulgarity of modern taste. The poem ends with an expanded view of the social realm of fops and coxcombs: of the pride taken by fops in their appearance even in church, of clergymen turned men of mode, of fops parading in the Mall, before returning once more to the stage, for “F[oote] and Fool alike in Sound agree”.<sup>35</sup> The final scene considers the equivalence between dog-fighting and boxing at Broughton’s amphitheatre in Hanway Street, a just emblem, Kenrick suggests, for the trivial vulgarity of high cultural pursuits in London.

### (iii) *Civic Didactic Verse*

Finally, there is an interesting group of longer descriptive poems in the collection that describe the activities of the city and urban life. An example is Glover’s descriptive poem *London: Or, The Progress of Commerce*, published in quarto by Thomas Cooper in 1739, and acquired by Tom’s on “Nov ye 7th, 1739”. It offers an account of the prosperity of London in a historical vision, exploring the reasons why commerce, personified as a goddess, found her home in the city.<sup>36</sup> Having her original residence amongst the Phoenecians, Commerce visits Carthage, Rome, Spain and the Dutch before she accepts an “invitation to choose England as her chief abode, more particularly London, our chief emporium” (to quote from the Argument, p. 1). London is praised for its fortunate and pleasing physical geography, but more especially for its people:

Thou nurse of arts, and thy industrious race;  
Pleas’d with their candid manners, with their free  
Sagacious converse, of enquiry led,  
And zeal for knowledge. (p. 22, ll. 414–17)

The poet eulogises Commerce:

Thy votary, O Commerce! Gracious pow’r!  
Continue still to hear my vows, and bless

<sup>35</sup> Kenrick, *The Town*, p. 22.

<sup>36</sup> Richard Glover, *London: Or, The Progress of Commerce. A Poem* (London: T. Cooper, 1739), 30pp., 4°, BL, Poems XI1: 11630.d.12.(18), ESTCT41171. Endorsement: “Toms Coffeehouse, Nov ye 7th, 1739 / No. 140”. Right margin cropped: “Mss[rs]”.

My honourable industry, which courts  
 No other smile but thine; for thou alone  
 Can'st wealth bestow with independence crown'd:  
 Nor yet exclude contemplative repose,  
 But to my dwelling grant the solemn calm  
 Of learned leisure. (p. 23)

The poem was a sensation when first published, and Glover was celebrated and attacked as the "City bard".<sup>37</sup>

As this chapter has suggested, a considerable number of texts – especially verse, but also prose – share what is here called the 'discourse of civic urbanism', debating the art of living in a modern and commercial city. The term 'civic urbanism' identifies how these works pursue a model for urban living for the gentleman of taste and learning. In this sense, civic urbanism overlapped with other modes of gentlemanly self-fashioning, such as those promoted in the discourse of the familiar letter, in manuals of commerce, or in conduct-books for the courtier.<sup>38</sup> Civic urbanism, as it emerges piecemeal in this diverse collection of poems, is austere but sociable; embedded in the urban fabric rather than retired or rural; middling rather than aristocratic; public, not private; polite, not vulgar; neo-Classical, Horatian, and reformatory rather than combative and Juvenalian; commercial or professional, not leisured; moderate in its passions and its interests, not given to party strife or sectarian zealotry; and primarily, active and engaged in the arts and sciences.<sup>39</sup> A key point of reference for such discourse was an attack on luxury and its disparate cognates, including especially vices of excess and venality; it was also hostile to faction and enthusiasm.

37 The poem was advertised in the *London Evening Post* and the *General Evening Post* on 6–8 November, and in *The Daily Advertiser* on 7 November. It was attacked in a ministerial paper, the *Daily Gazetteer*, identifying Glover as a "City Bard" and "mercantile Poet"; and defended by Fielding in *The Champion* (24 Nov 1739) and Henry Baker in *The Universal Spectator* (24 Nov and 1 Dec 1739). It is discussed by William Dowling in John J. Richetti (ed.) *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660–1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

38 Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 2–3.

39 Key discussions relevant to my adoption of this term are J.G.A. Pocock, 'Virtue, Rights and Manners: A Model for Historians of Political Thought', in *Virtue, Commerce and History: Essays on Political Thought and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 48–49; Louis Wirth, 'Urbanism as a Way of Life', *American Journal of Sociology*, 44.1 (July 1938), pp. 1–24.

While there is no comparable provenance evidence that coffee-house libraries were established across the Atlantic in British America, David Shields and others have argued that colonial coffeehouses also promoted themselves as the location of a polite ideology of civil debate, egalitarian manners and belles lettres – which is to say, a kind of civic urbanism. Many of the poetry publications collected in the Tom's Coffee-House library were available for sale in the North American colonies, imported from England. While these publications seem not to have been collected into a library by coffee-house subscribers, they may have been encountered and read there, and as such may have contributed to the Shields model of the polite gentlemanly culture of coffee-house *belles-lettres*. An additional irony is provided by the activities of William Wragg, a subscriber to poetry and other publications at Tom's, who also, on his return to his native Charleston in 1750, became a subscriber to the Charleston Library Society, of which both his father and uncle had been founder members in 1748.<sup>40</sup> As this reminds us, the coffee-house library is part of a continuum of sociable libraries that includes subscription libraries, proprietary joint-stock, institutional and circulating libraries, and various forms library societies and clubs.<sup>41</sup>

### Reading in the Coffee-House

The final section of this chapter turns to how poetry was read in the coffee-house. The first piece of evidence is from a burlesque verse satire by a little known but prolific satirist, Macnamara Morgan, called *The Porcupinade, a very poetical Poem*, published in 1745. It offers a mock-heroic account of the history of poetry in England, including the role of critics and coffee-houses.

Blest be the medic\* Sheep, who first discover'd  
*Arabia's* Fruit so potable and fragrant,  
 Which social aggregates, in Mixture bland,  
 At *George's, Richard's, Bedford's, Tom's* and *Slaughter's*,  
 The various Brood of Man; while various Themes,

40 James Raven, *London Booksellers and American Customers: Transatlantic Literary Community and the Charleston Library Society, 1748–1811* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2002).

41 James Raven, 'Libraries for Sociability', in Giles Mandelbrote and K.A. Manley (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland, Volume 2: 1640–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 239–63.

Cricket, Love, Politics, Stocks, Plays and Battles,  
 Mix with the tepid Steam; while curious some  
 The Pamphlet of Projector, Peer, or Starv'ling  
 Intent peruse, or cheaply damn; befriended  
 With modern Art to further Reading, by  
 Preventing Writing.

\* Coffee is said to have been first discover'd, by its exhilarating Effects on some Sheep, who brou'd on the Plant in Berry.<sup>42</sup>

Although Morgan's enthusiasm for coffee consumption forges an extended analogy between drinking and reading poetry, he has a somewhat jaundiced view of the value of coffee-house reading, which serves simply as a distraction from the more important work of writing.

The second piece of evidence relates the experience of using a coffee-house library by the poet William Shenstone, during his first visit to London in January 1741. Having taken up residence above a perfumer's shop at the King's Arms, on the Fleet Street side of Temple Bar, in the first few weeks of his stay he reports that he went frequently to the theatre, and that he was impressed by the "universality of learning" of the common people. Everyone, he noted, had an opinion, whether it be about the genius of Shakespeare or the latest political crisis. As a keen follower of controversial pamphlet literature, but aware of the cost of buying all that was on offer, he was pleased to find that he could read them in a coffee-house. He wrote to his friend Richard Graves

What do you think must be my expence, who love to pry into every thing of this kind? Why, truly, one shilling. My company goes to George's Coffee-house, where, for that small subscription, I read all the pamphlets under a three-shilling dimensions; and indeed, any larger ones would not be fit for coffee-house perusal.<sup>43</sup>

Shenstone's enthusiasm for the coffee-house library at George's was that it offered good value and wide exposure to the pamphlet publications of the day.

42 *The Porcupinade, A Very Poetical Poem, to which is Prefix'd A Copy of Smooth Commendatory Rhymes to the Author from Porcupinus Pelagius, Author of the Triumvirade. By Quid-nuncius Profundus* (London: W. Webb, 1745), 28pp., 4° (p. 23), BL, 11630.c.6.(17). Endorsed top half-title cropped: "Toms Coffee House" "No. 101". Foxon P1000.

43 Marjorie Williams (ed.), *The Letters of William Shenstone* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1939), p. 21.

On April 23 of that year, Shenstone's first poem, called *The Judgment of Hercules*, was published.<sup>44</sup> At thirty-five pages, the octavo poem was a high-status pamphlet production published under the sign of Tully's Head by the prestigious Pall Mall bookseller of Robert Dodsley, and printed by Thomas Cooper in Paternoster Row. The poem was addressed to George Lyttelton, MP for Okehampton, Secretary to Frederick, Prince of Wales, and a leader of the patriot opposition to Walpole. Lyttelton was a man who wielded considerable patronage amongst poets. With its mixture of classical learning, its neoclassical versification, and its panegyric to one of the great statesmen of the Whig opposition, this was a poem that was designed to establish Shenstone within the literary economy of the city. Writing to Richard Jago on 30 April 1741, a week after the publication of his poem, he reported how it was received at George's:

I was loitering yesterday in the coffee-room, when two persons came in, well-dressed, and called for my poem; read a page or two, and commended the four lines upon Mr. Lyttelton extremely, ("Lov'd by that Prince, &c") repeated to them forty times, and in the end got them by heart.

The lines these men seize upon are located at the heart of the poem's praise of Lyttelton.

Lov'd by that Prince whom ev'ry Virtue fires:  
Prais'd by that Bard whom ev'ry Muse inspires:  
Blest in the tuneful Art, the social Flame;  
In all that wins, in all that merits Fame!<sup>45</sup>

These two readers, Shenstone relates, were then interrupted by a third, who disagreed with their critical judgements. The third man's politics were different: he was not of the Prince of Wales's party, opposed to Walpole's ministry. He remarked that "he knew of no virtue that the Prince *was* fired with, and then endeavoured to mimic the Prince's way of talking" (the Prince spoke with a strong German accent). Nonetheless, he shared their critical method by identifying a different four-line extract as worthy of commendation: "says he, *I'll shew you the four best lines in the poem*", and reading out his choice.

44 William Shenstone, *The Judgment of Hercules, a Poem. Inscrib'd to George Lyttelton Esq;* (London: printed for R. Dodsley, and sold by T. Cooper, 1741) [2],35,[3]pp.; 8°. The copy from George's does not survive, but that from Tom's does: New York Historical Society Shelfmk, Y1741.Shen. Endorsed top right half-title "No. 18"; top title page cropped "Toms Coffee house / June 1[...] / by Subscription".

45 Shenstone, *Judgment of Hercules*, p. 6.



'Twas Youth's perplexing Stage his Doubts inspir'd,  
 When great *Alcides* to a Grove retir'd.  
 Thro' the lone Windings of a devious Glade,  
 Resign'd to Thought, with ling'ring Steps he Stray'd.<sup>46</sup>

While the first two men found in the poem a defence of the sociability of urban life, the third man located the retirement conceit, although these latter lines were dismissed by Shenstone in his letter to Jago as "flat enough, God knows". The critics' conversation continued by debating what the anonymous author might have meant by the poem. Shenstone takes great delight in reporting to Jago that they thought it was some sort of gossipy allegorical satire on Lyttelton's amours, where the two women met by the poem's hero are not the allegorical figures of Vice and Virtue but rather two rival courtesans in court circles.

*Ay, ay, you know Mr. Lyttelton did retire, he was in the secession; read on: you'll find he mentions Delia anon. Don't you remember Mr. Lyttelton wrote a song upon Delia? but proceed – you'll find he is going to give a description of two ladies of different characters, that were in love with Mr. Lyttelton. One was (here he named two names, which I have forgot.)*

Shenstone concludes his report of this conversation with a crowning joke – a joke that reflects very well on him. One of the men says "*Upon my word, it is fine: I believe it is Pope's; but how comes Pope to praise himself there? ('Lov'd by that Bard, &c.')* No doubt, however, it was written by Mr. Pope or Mr. Dodsley".<sup>47</sup> For young Shenstone's anonymous poem to be attributed to Pope or Dodsley is flattery in the extreme, yet this is balanced not only by his report of their ridiculous political reading, but also his final comment.

My critics proceeded to the reading of the last simile *immediately, without* the lines preceding it, and, agreeing that it was a very good thing, called out for "The Oeconomy of Love".

The poem they call for in succession to Shenstone's book is *The Oeconomy of Love*, a notorious anonymous poem attributed to the physician Dr John Armstrong (1708/9–79).<sup>48</sup> First published in 1736, *The Oeconomy of Love* was an

46 Shenstone, *Judgment of Hercules*, p. 6.

47 Williams, *Letters*, p. 24.

48 John Armstrong, *The Oeconomy of Love* (London: T. Cooper, 1736).

explicit and libertine descriptive poem (in the technical sense) of the development of the sexual organs and diverse sexual practices, versified in precise physiological detail in an eroticised poetic diction. Shenstone comments ruefully to Jago

So you see “*Laudant illa, sed ista legunt*”, is the case [“They praise those but read these”, Martial, *Epigrams*]. A person cannot be supposed vain from the approbation of such critics, or else I would not have inserted such a *commendatory* paragraph.

The anecdote Shenstone creates of this coffee-house conversation he witnessed, with its well-turned classical motto in conclusion, should of course be taken with a grain of salt: although it claims the status of an eye-witness report, there is clearly much intermediation between event and narration. Shenstone’s anecdote was however popular amongst his friends, for his publisher and patron, Robert Dodsley, also recounted the tale.<sup>49</sup>

As a critical practice, coffee-house library reading, in Shenstone’s account, shows surprising sophistication. The readers’ critical practice is to read aloud to each other and to repeat chosen lines so as to learn them by heart. They also put a lot of effort into attribution. Criticism is sociable: the two men are joined by a third, who disagrees with their judgements, but does so in a way that they find engaging and even entertaining. It is a meeting of friends and strangers: the conversation on the poem is the occasion of their sociability, not the other way around. Coffee-house reading is public, sociable and integrative. As well as offering a range of poetic discourse on coffee-house behaviours, the activity of reading poetry in the coffee-house offered further versions of civic urbanism in practice. The anecdote also makes an interesting point about how the coffee-house library worked: when the men enter the coffee-room, they ask the waiter for the poem; and when they tire of it, they call for another. As this suggests, the collection was kept in sufficient order for individual items to be identified and retrieved by the waiter, who perhaps should also be known as the librarian.

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49 “Mr Shenstone had the satisfaction at a coffee-house, to hear the judicious remarks of some young people on his poem; who came to a resolution, that it must certainly be either Pope’s or Mr. R. Dodsley’s”. Robert Dodsley, in Richard Graves, *Recollection of Some Particulars in the Life of the late William Shenstone, Esq. in a Series of Letters from an Intimate Friend of his to –, Esq. F.R.S.* (London: printed for J. Dodsley, 1788), p. 93.

## Of Mudfish, Harpsichords and Books: Libraries and Community in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica

*April G. Shelford\**

On Tuesday, 4 June 1771, Samuel Hayward, a merchant residing in Savannah-la-Mar, Jamaica, loaned his friend Thomas Thistlewood a copy of Luigi Cornaro's *Discourses on a Sober and Temperate Life* (1768). Thistlewood kept the book for two months. In the meantime, he kept busy managing his property, Breadnut Island Pen, located a few miles west of town. Many of his activities revolved around his slaves, whose hire was his chief source of income. He purchased fabric for their clothing, medicated them when they fell ill,<sup>1</sup> assigned them duties in the garden he was making into a horticultural wonder and sometimes gave them time to tend their provision grounds. He also flogged them for infractions and repeatedly forced his sexual attentions on Abba, one of the female slaves. He renewed his subscription to the *Kingston Journal*, paid his poll tax, fretted over the caterpillars ruining his turnips, removed the roach-infested curtains from his library, sold or gave away radishes, peas, okra, kale and asparagus – and no doubt worried about the report of a slave rising in Tobago. John, his son by his enslaved companion Phibbah, came and went to Savannah-la-Mar to study with Mr Hughes. Thistlewood came and went, too, taking tea at the Weech's and dining with Hughes and Hayward. He hosted his own feasts, serving at one of them roast pig, stewed land turtle, shrimps, apple dumplings, asparagus, cheese, musk melon, porter, punch and brandy. He also lent and borrowed books and periodicals from other friends. Finally, after transcribing twenty-six passages into his commonplace book, he returned the *Discourses* to Hayward on 6 August.<sup>2</sup>

\* Many thanks to the American Philosophical Society and the University of the West Indies, Jamaica, for the opportunity to work closely with the Thistlewood papers. I cite the journals by shelf mark MONSON and the date; commonplace books, by shelf mark and Thistlewood/post-Thistlewood pagination.

1 For an in-depth study of this aspect of Thistlewood's slave management, see Amanda Thornton, 'Coerced Care: Thomas Thistlewood's Account of Medical Practice on Enslaved Populations in Colonial Jamaica, 1751–1786', *Slavery & Abolition*, 32.4 (2011), pp. 535–59.

2 Entries on Thistlewood's activities, MONSON 31/22, 4 June–6 Aug 1771; commonplaceing of Cornaro's *Discourses*, MONSON 36/40–39/43.

Thomas Thistlewood is well known to scholars of the Caribbean and the Atlantic World, chiefly through the indispensable biographies by Douglas Hall and Trevor Burnard.<sup>3</sup> Both historians have expertly mined his journals – thirty-seven volumes detailing his life in Jamaica from 1750 to 1786 – to reveal much about race and slavery in eighteenth-century Jamaica, subjects that have long been central concerns in Caribbean history. But Thistlewood's manuscripts, which include four volumes of commonplace books, have not been utilised in the context proposed here: the histories of the book and reading. Indeed, these subjects are almost wholly absent from Caribbean history in sharp contrast to that of the North American colonies.

This neglect may seem deserved given the declaration of one of Thistlewood's contemporaries that "learning is here at the lowest Ebb".<sup>4</sup> In 1759, the wife of a Jamaican planter returning to England similarly sniffed that she would be bringing their books "as a taste for literature does by no means prevail in this country".<sup>5</sup> Yet, according to Giles Barber, the West Indies and New England received about the same amount of British books exported to the Americas between 1700 and 1780, with Jamaica importing nearly as many books as New York.<sup>6</sup> But there is no straightforward interpretation of Giles's statistics. Burnard finds few books mentioned in Jamaican wills,<sup>7</sup> and James Raven suggests that shipments to the West Indies appear large because clerks recorded only the ship's first destination of their circum-Atlantic voyages.<sup>8</sup> In contrast, Kenneth Morgan writes that shipping to Jamaica from Bristol came to be dominated

3 Douglas Hall, *In Miserable Slavery: Thomas Thistlewood in Jamaica, 1750–1786* (Kingston: University of Jamaica Press, 1989); Trevor Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and his Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World* (Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2004).

4 Charles Leslie, *A New and Exact Account of Jamaica* (Edinburgh, 1740), p. 36. South Carolinians and Charlestonians were similarly dismissed – assertions that require re-evaluation, according to James Raven, *London Booksellers and American Customers: Transatlantic Literary Community and the Charleston Library Society, 1748–1811* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), pp. 26–28.

5 Mary Ricketts; cited in Roderick Cave, *Printing and the Book Trade in the West Indies* (London: The Pindar Press, 1987), p. 106.

6 Giles Barber, 'Books from the Old World and for the New: The British International Trade in Books in the Eighteenth Century', in Theodore Besterman (ed.), *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation, 1976), pp. 198, 200, 224. Roderick Cave expanded on Barber in *Printing and the Book Trade*, whose first chapter reprints his earlier study, 'Early Printing and the Book Trade in the West Indies', *Library Quarterly*, 48.2 (1978), pp. 163–92.

7 Burnard, *Mastery*, p. 288 n.19.

8 James Raven, *The Business of Books: Booksellers and the English Book-Trade, 1450–1850* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 186.

by direct routes,<sup>9</sup> and Warren McDougall has shown that a number of Scottish publications ended up in Jamaica.<sup>10</sup> Finally, while Raven characterises Jamaican libraries as small,<sup>11</sup> the same has been said of North American libraries.<sup>12</sup>

Clearly the question requires further research, but Thistlewood's journals prove that a fair number of people took some trouble to purchase, then share many books in his corner of Jamaica. Moreover, they transformed their private collections into an ad hoc community library through borrowing and lending. There was nothing new, of course, about borrowing books. Scholars have acknowledged its existence, but, however "extensive and unquantifiable", it resists systematic analysis.<sup>13</sup> Nor was there anything new about coming together to make publications a community resource. The rich scholarship on the rage for creating book clubs and especially subscription libraries abundantly proves that.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, Burnard has noted the borrowing and lending activity that

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- 9 Kenneth Morgan, 'Shipping Patterns and the Atlantic Trade of Bristol, 1749–1770', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third series, 46.3 (1989), pp. 506–38.
  - 10 Warren McDougall, 'Copyright Litigation in the Court of Session, 1738–1749, and the Rise of the Scottish Book Trade', *Transactions of the Edinburgh Bibliographical Society*, 5.5 (1988), p. 17; 'Scottish Books for America in the Mid-18th century', in Robin Myers and Michael Harris (eds.), *Spreading the Word: The Distribution Networks of Print, 1550–1850* (Winchester and Detroit: St. Paul's Bibliographies, 1990), pp. 21–46, especially Table 1.
  - 11 Raven, *Business of Books*, p. 186.
  - 12 Elizabeth Carroll Reilly and David D. Hall, 'Customers and the Market for Books', in Hugh Amory and David D. Hall (eds.), *The History of the Book, Volume 1: The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 388.
  - 13 R.A. Houston, cited in Mark Towsey, "'I can't resist sending you the book': Private Libraries, Elite Women, and Shared Reading Practices in Georgian Britain", *Library and Information History*, 29.3 (2013), pp. 210–22; also see his *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment: Books and their Readers in Provincial Scotland, 1750–1820* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 47–54; Giles Mandelbrote, 'Personal Owners of Books', in Giles Mandelbrote and K.A. Manley (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland, Volume 2: 1640–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 175, 178; David Allan, *A Nation of Readers: The Lending Library in Georgian England* (London: British Library, 2008), pp. 212–14; for a perceptive study of the practice in a nineteenth-century American setting, Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray, 'Home Libraries and the Institutionalization of Everyday Practices among Antebellum New Englanders', *American Studies*, 42.3 (2001), pp. 63–86, at pp. 71–76.
  - 14 David Allan, *Nation of Readers*, pp. 61–118; David Allan, 'Politeness and the Politics of Culture: An Intellectual History of the Eighteenth-Century Subscription Library', *Library & Information History*, 29.3 (2013), pp. 159–69; K.A. Manley, 'Rural Reading in Northwest England: The Sedbergh Book Club, 1728–1928', *Book History*, 2 (1999), pp. 80–81; Towsey, *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment*, pp. 56–91.

took place between Thistlewood and his neighbours.<sup>15</sup> But this chapter analyses that activity systematically, considering it in the context of metropolitan reading practices and referring to North American developments. Doing so reveals a Caribbean improvisation on metropolitan practices as Thistlewood and his neighbours drew from “the rich storehouse of available social tools and knowledge ... select[ing] whatever was most useful to their specific efforts at social reconstruction in a particular space”.<sup>16</sup> While they had an interest in acquiring and reading books as keen as their metropolitan counterparts, they lacked the mass to create an elaborate institutional structure. Instead, they created an informal, flexible exchange network. This is not to say that they set out intentionally to do so; rather, the value they assigned to books and the social tug reading exerted was in their cultural DNA, so to speak, which found expression in ways appropriate to their circumstances and meeting their needs.

This chapter thus contributes to our understanding of how white Jamaicans, despite their small number, “developed a rich, vibrant, and distinctive culture”,<sup>17</sup> one with an intellectual component in which libraries mattered. After detailing the Caribbean context in which Thistlewood and his friends purchased, borrowed and lent books, this chapter describes the network they created: who participated, how they did so and to what extent, what they exchanged and how this activity related to other aspects of their lives.<sup>18</sup> This is a relatively straightforward, if challenging, task because Thistlewood’s journals provide abundant evidence. It is more difficult to determine precisely what reading meant to these readers because we have no direct evidence from any of them other than Thistlewood’s own commonplace books.<sup>19</sup> We may

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15 Hall mentions when Thistlewood borrowed or lent books, too, but Burnard discusses it more coherently in *Mastery*, pp. 103–13. Much of this is useful, but Burnard’s discussion falters by posing such unhelpful binaries as “How could an Enlightenment man also be a cruel tyrant?”

16 Jack P. Greene, ‘Social and Cultural Capital in Colonial British America: A Case Study’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 29.3 (1999), p. 496.

17 Burnard, *Mastery*, p. 245.

18 The journals of Jonathan Troup, a physician who lived in Dominica from 1789 to 1791, reveal similar patterns of book borrowing and lending – if on a smaller scale. University of Aberdeen Library, Scotland, MS2070, ‘Journal of Jonathan Troup, physician, of Aberdeen, Scotland and Dominica, West Indies’.

19 Thistlewood’s commonplace books have received neither detailed nor systematic analysis. See April G. Shelford, ‘Pascal in Jamaica: or, The French Enlightenment in Translation’, *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History*, 36 (2008) [<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.0642292.0036.006>; accessed 22 January 2017]. I differ from Burnard in seeing Thistlewood’s commonplace books as evidence of serious intellectual engagement and will explore this further in a book tentatively titled ‘A Caribbean Enlightenment’.

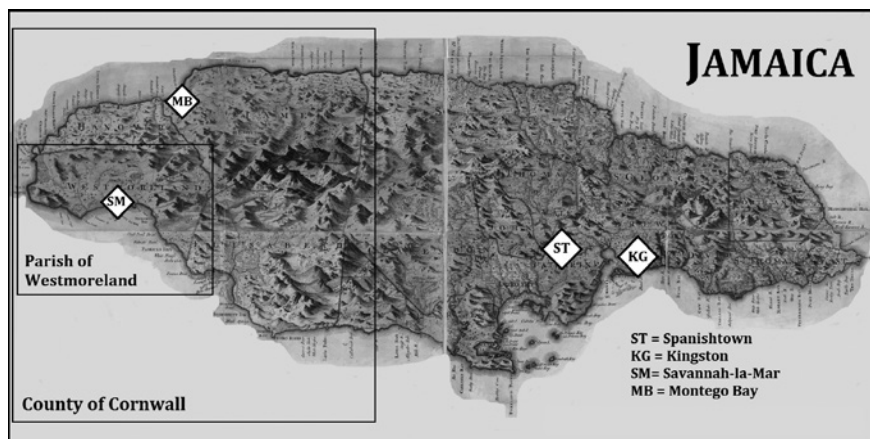


FIGURE 3.1 *Jamaica in 1763.*

Based on Thomas Craskell's 1763 map of Jamaica, which is held by the Geography and Map Division of the Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

COLLECTION OF THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

nevertheless responsibly speculate about the important cultural work these activities accomplished for them – from eluding boredom, to consolidating community, to connecting them with Enlightenment intellectual culture – by considering their activity in the context of the slave society in which they lived.

The parish of Westmoreland was located in Cornwall, Jamaica's westernmost county, far from the island's population centres of the southeast (Figure 3.1). In 1754, mercantile Kingston had fewer than three thousand whites while the capital Spanishtown probably had just eight hundred.<sup>20</sup> After the government made peace with the Maroons (runaway slaves who sheltered in the area's mountains) in 1739–40, the parish experienced rapid economic growth. By 1768, it produced almost twelve percent of the island's sugar with just five and eight percent of its white and slave populations respectively.<sup>21</sup> It is difficult to state precisely the white population of Thistlewood's parish during the period under discussion. Jack P. Greene has recently estimated that the slave population of Westmoreland was 15,186 in 1768.<sup>22</sup> The white population of the parish would not have exceeded one thousand if the 1774 proportion between white

20 James Robertson, *Gone Is the Ancient Glory: Spanish Town Jamaica, 1554–2000* (Jamaica: Ian Randle, 2005), p. 91.

21 Burnard, *Mastery*, p. 23.

22 Jack H. Greene, *Settler Jamaica in the 1750s: A Social Portrait* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016), p. 30.

and enslaved held; of that, only about a quarter would be adult females if we assume that the demographic rule for the rest of the island held, too.<sup>23</sup>

In his *History of Jamaica* (1774), Edward Long had little good to say about Savannah-la-Mar, the parish's administrative centre and chief port. Comprised of "one tolerable street, and fifty or sixty scattered houses", it was "unhealthy and inferior" because it was situated on a lowland near a marsh.<sup>24</sup> Yet two courts convened there, a court of common-pleas since 1752 and the county's assize-court since 1758. Despite being a "very indifferent harbour", the town was the parish's chief port with sixty to seventy vessels calling each year. In contrast, Long found the parish beautiful and promising. Its savannahs were "rich and fertile" and its western hills particularly productive, though the mountainous northeastern portion was left largely to the Maroons.<sup>25</sup> Many planters lived on or near the Cabaritto, the parish's largest river that was navigable several miles inland and that emptied into the Caribbean Sea a few miles west of Savannah-la-Mar.

Thistlewood spent almost his entire life in Jamaica close enough to Savannah-la-Mar to travel there and return the same day. Until 1767, he worked as an overseer on John Cope's Egypt Plantation, then became an independent proprietor by purchasing Breadnut Island Pen, located between Egypt and town and bordered by the Cabaritto. While living in eighteenth-century Jamaica – particularly in a 'frontier' parish like Westmoreland – created opportunities, it also held considerable dangers. Enterprising white men like Thistlewood could acquire a measure of wealth and status that they would not have achieved in Britain, but no one could ever feel at ease. High mortality among slaves and masters alike made it impossible for the island to maintain its population without constant arrivals of newcomers, and slave demographics were catastrophic.<sup>26</sup> The barracks constructed in the parish after Tacky's Revolt in 1761 was a reminder of the precarious situation of whites.<sup>27</sup> Jamaican society was decidedly male, then, and also brutal. Yet as savage, even sadistic, as Thistlewood's punishment of his slaves and as predatory as his behaviour

23 According to a 1774 census cited by Burnard, the island's entire population included 12,737 whites and 192,787 slaves. Burnard also estimated that, of the entire white population, one-quarter comprised adult females. Trevor Burnard, "Prodigious Riches": The Wealth of Jamaica Before the American Revolution', *The Economic History Review*, 54:3 (2001), pp. 507, 514.

24 Edward Long, *History of Jamaica* (London, 1774), ii.200, 201, 203.

25 Ibid., ii.203.

26 Trevor Burnard, 'A Failed Settler Society: Marriage and Demographic Failure in Early Jamaica', *Journal of Social History*, 28.1 (1994), pp. 63–82.

27 Long, *History*, ii.204.



towards the females were he was hardly alone.<sup>28</sup> Violence towards slaves was omnipresent and frequently shockingly casual as when Thistlewood noted that “Mrs Allwood (Dr Allwood’s wife) has flogged another Negroe wench to death ... This is said to be the 3rd she has killed”.<sup>29</sup> With good reason, Burnard describes eighteenth-century Jamaica as “a fast-living, intensely materialistic, and fiercely individualistic society”, as well as “a society at war”.<sup>30</sup> But it was also, he argues, more egalitarian than metropolitan society as the demographic imbalance between enslaved and free encouraged wealthy planters to make common cause with less prosperous men such as Thistlewood.<sup>31</sup>

Savannah-la-Mar was obviously too small to offer urban amenities such as bookstores and coffee-houses, much less a theatre or subscription library.<sup>32</sup> Clearly, residents had to take the initiative if there were to be any cultural or intellectual life in the area. Borrowing and lending books was a natural response to this dearth of options, and this activity, taken together, created an informal book exchange network. While this chapter focuses particularly on the ten-year period from 1768 to 1777, Thistlewood’s journals suggest that such activities began long before 1768 and continued after 1777. Thistlewood himself had been collecting books for years – indeed, he arrived on the island with a substantial ‘starter’ collection.<sup>33</sup> But 1768 is a good date at which to begin a close analysis because, by purchasing his own property, he had become his own man and could now create spaces devoted to his intellectual activities: a garden for his horticultural assays and a library for his books. There is no evidence, though, that Thistlewood’s change in status affected the network itself. This was a small community, and Burnard’s account makes clear that Thistlewood was a known quantity before he purchased property. Thus, he continued to exchange books with the same kinds of people, and he showed himself no more generous or stingy. Other factors – newcomers attracted to the region’s economic bustle, mortality,

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28 Comparing odious behaviour is odious, of course. That said, Harry Weech’s savage disfigurement of his enslaved mistress is remarkable. He is not to be confused with Mrs Weech’s merchant husband. Burnard, *Mastery*, p. 53.

29 MONSON 31/21, 13 August 1770.

30 Burnard, *Mastery*, pp. 18, 33.

31 For an important critique, see Cecilia Green, ‘Hierarchies of Whiteness in the Geographies of Empire: Thomas Thistlewood and the Barretts of Jamaica’, *New West Indian Guide / Nieuw West-Indische Gids*, 80.1–2 (2006), pp. 5–43.

32 The first theatre in the county was established in 1777 in Montego Bay; *Cornwall Chronicle*, 15 February 1777, p. 1. The lack of libraries contrasts with Charleston and other North American cities; Raven, *London Booksellers*, p. 3.

33 Thistlewood listed more than 150 titles under the heading “February 3 1750. Had on Board of the Flying Flamborough when I left England” in MONSON 31/85.

colonists heading home, even dissatisfaction with potential partners – probably affected who Thistlewood elected to exchange books with the most.

While I have strived to compile accurate and comprehensive information about Thistlewood's partners and what they exchanged, there are certainly omissions. Thistlewood generally noted the dates when he loaned or borrowed and when he returned or received back a loan, which gave me two chances to pick up a transaction. Yet even he no doubt forgot to note an exchange once in a while. What is more, the sheer density of information in his journals is daunting, making it difficult to identify all relevant information. That said, I am confident that I have succeeded in capturing the complexity and the scope of the activity. Second, because our information comes from Thistlewood's journals, we know only about activity that began and ended with him. Yet it is likely that other participants loaned or borrowed books from people other than Thistlewood. If we knew about all this individual activity and could chart it, we would end up with many circles, some smaller, others larger, intersecting with each other to a greater or lesser degree. The 'intellectual profiles' of these individual networks – that is, the concentration of titles in one or another subject category – would have reflected individual interests just as Thistlewood's network reflected his (see below). In other words, there is no reason to assume that Thistlewood's activity was exceptional. Note, too, that I distinguish between a title and an exchange, the latter being the occasion when partners actually exchanged published materials. The total number of exchanges exceeds the number of titles because owners frequently doled out multi-volume works singly or a couple of volumes at a time.

Table 3.1 documents all exchanges over the ten-year period. Despite the spike in 1769 (forty-two), the number of exchanges remained fairly stable until bottoming out in 1773 (eighteen). From then on, activity recovered rapidly, with the last three years consistently exceeding the first year of 1768 (thirty-one). The total number of participants ranged widely as well, from a low of six in 1771 to a high of sixteen in 1775. Reasonably enough, an increasing number of participants pushed up the total number of exchanges as the number of 'core' participants plus Thistlewood's best friend Hayward remained relatively stable. In any given year, though, this group accounted for the majority of exchanges, as we will see later.

Another way to grasp the activity of Thistlewood's network is to tally titles and track their movement over time. A compilation of discrete titles over the same ten-year period results in forty-three individuals (excluding Hayward) exchanging just over 170 titles. Many exchanges were isolated instances rather than part of enduring patterns. The latter concerns me most because of my interest in Thistlewood's friendships, particularly those centred around intellectual activities, especially natural history. But these people also truly mattered more. They remain after excluding partners who, with a couple of

TABLE 3.1    *Number of exchanges and participants per year in Thistlewood's book exchange network. An exchange = an occasion when a participant actually handed over printed materials.*

Year	1768	1769	1770	1771	1772	1773	1774	1775	1776	1777	Total
No. of exchanges	31	42	28	28	28	18	21	48	39	42	325
No. of partners	9	8	7	6	10	7	10	16	11	14	43
(No. of core partners + Hayward)	(6)	(5)	(4)	(5)	(7)	(4)	(5)	(9)	(7)	(5)	(12)

exceptions, exchanged fewer than five titles with Thistlewood.<sup>34</sup> This core of a dozen participants accounts for a disproportionate amount of activity over the period. Excluding Hayward, just eleven of the forty-three participants accounted for nearly three-quarters of the titles exchanged. Over the same period, Thistlewood's exchanges with these same individuals constituted nearly three-quarters of his total loans *and* total borrowings. But no one came close to the number of loans between Thistlewood and his best friend Samuel Hayward. We might even say that while Thistlewood created a community library with the core, he and Hayward established a nearly joint collection. Over the ten-year period, Thistlewood lent Hayward 117 titles and borrowed eighty-one. If we add this activity to the core, we get a total of 330 titles exchanged, with Thistlewood loaning 173 and borrowing 157 (Table 3.3).

Who constituted the 'core'? Information about them is limited, but revealing.<sup>35</sup> Clearly Thistlewood's proximity to Savannah-la-Mar ensured that he had more potential partners who were also more diverse professionally than if he had resided in a more isolated area. Thistlewood exchanged books with several lawyers, for example, and a couple of ship's captains, though none of them figure in the core. Like Hayward, William Antrobus was a merchant residing in Savannah-la-Mar; the schoolmaster Daniel Hughes lived there, too. Samuel Say was an overseer who partnered with Thistlewood to purchase the land they subsequently divided between them. William Pommells was an indigo

34    Forexample,IexcludeWilliamBoddingtonandJamesRobertson,latecomerstotheexchange networkwho may have participated after1777. Iinclude Samuel Bell because I know he made the cut-off in 1778, the last year for which I have compiled information, and because Thistlewood particularly cultivated friendships with medical men. People who exchanged books exclusively before 1768 or after 1777 go unaccounted for altogether, of course.

35    Hall's and Burnard's biographies are invaluable in establishing the identities of participants in Thistlewood's book exchange network.

TABLE 3.2 *Number of titles exchanged in Thistlewood's book exchange network, core group, 1768–77. Multi-volume works borrowed or lent over several exchanges = one discrete title.*

Name (profession, if known)	Sex	Year	No. of titles TT loans to	No. of titles TT borrows from	Total no. TT loans for period	Total no. TT borrows for period	Total no. exchanges
William Antrobus (merchant)	M	1772		2	3	8	11
		1773		3			
		1775	1	2			
		1777	2				
Samuel Bell (physician)	M	1776		2	1	3	4
		1777	1	1			
John Cope (sugar planter)	M	1768	1	4	2	8	10
		1770		1			
		1774		1			
		1775	1	1			
		1777		1			
Polly Cope (daughter of above)	F	1772		1	4	1	5
		1775	2				
		1776	2				
Daniel Hughes (schoolmaster)	M	1768		1	7	8	15
		1769	3	2			
		1770	3				
		1771	1	2			
		1772		2			
		1775		1			
Thomas King (physician)	M	1768	1		6	8	14
		1771	2	2			
		1774		1			
		1775	2	1			
		1776		1			
		1777	1	3			

Name (profession, if known)	Sex	Year	No. of titles TT loans to	No. of titles TT borrows from	Total no. TT loans for period	Total no. TT borrows for period	Total no. exchanges
Richard Panton (physician)	M	1772		1	2	5	7
		1774		1			
		1775	2	1			
		1776		1			
		1773		1			
William Pommells (indigo planter)	M	1769		5	1	10	11
		1773		1			
		1774		1			
		1775	1	2			
		1776		1			
Samuel Say (partner; employed on sugar estates)	M	1768	1	1	4	4	8
		1769	2	3			
		1772	1				
James Wedderburn (physician & owner of multiple estates)	M	1770	2		8	10	18
		1771		1			
		1773		1			
		1775	1	2			
		1776	5	6			
Mrs Weech (wife of merchant John at Savannah- la-Mar)	F	1768	9	1	18	11	29
		1769	5	4			
		1770	2	2			
		1771	1	1			
		1772	1	3			
Total number of titles exchanged					56	76	132

TABLE 3.3 *Number of titles exchanged in Thistlewood's book exchange network, core + Hayward, 1768–77. Multi-volume works borrowed or lent over several exchanges = one discrete title.*

Samuel Hayward (merchant, foundry owner)	Year	No. of titles TT loans	No. of titles Hayward loans	Total no. of titles TT loans	Total no. of titles TT borrows	Total no. of titles exchanged
	1768	8	9	117	81	198
	1769	8	11			
	1770	10	8			
	1771	18	6			
	1772	15	1			
	1773	6	4			
	1774	12	7			
	1775	13	14			
	1776	19	9			
	1777	8	12			
Number of titles exchanged (Core)				56	76	132
Total number of titles exchanged (Core + Hayward)				173	157	330

planter, while James Wedderburn was a physician who became a substantial landowner in Westmoreland, eventually owning several estates.<sup>36</sup> He was one of a group of physicians, which included Samuel Bell, Thomas King and Richard Panton. With the exception of Wedderburn (eventually), none were exceptionally well off. While Thistlewood knew and occasionally socialised with William Beckford, member of a fabulously wealthy planter dynasty, they did not exchange books. Thistlewood occasionally did exchange books with one of the Ricketts, also a wealthy planter family, though he did not figure in the core either. Not surprisingly, only two women participated: Polly Cope, the daughter

36 Wedderburn was the father of the prominent abolitionist Robert, whose mother was one of his slaves. He was also the brother of John, who fled Scotland after the Jacobite defeat at Culloden in 1746. John owned the slave Joseph Knight, who successfully sued for his freedom in Scotland in 1778. Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon, 2000), p. 287; Douglas J Hamilton, “Defending the Colonies against the Malicious Attacks of Philanthropy”: Scottish Campaigns Against the Abolitions of the Slave Trade and Slavery’, in Allan I. Macinnes and Douglas J. Hamilton (eds.), *Jacobitism, Enlightenment and Empire, 1680–1820* (New York: Pickering & Chatto, 2014), pp. 192–94.

of John Cope, a sugar planter who had employed Thistlewood, and Mrs Weech, wife of another merchant at Savannah-la-Mar. In short, we might characterise the core as a “colonial petty bourgeoisie”.<sup>37</sup> Its composition was comparable to the types of individuals who banded together in England, Scotland and South Carolina to create book clubs and subscription libraries, though the Jamaican network lacked clergy and artisans.<sup>38</sup>

Thistlewood's book exchange network mapped onto, confirmed and extended connections created by friendship, proximity, profession and civic duty. For example, in June 1768 when Thistlewood forwarded Oliphant two volumes of the *Babler* to return to their original owner, he also sent half-a-dozen mudfish and a bullhead.<sup>39</sup> In August 1769, he relished Robert Chambers' gift of “some exceeding fine pickled salmon”.<sup>40</sup> Mrs Weech shared food with Thistlewood, too, once sending him a jar of pickled walnuts.<sup>41</sup> A feast at Thistlewood's in February 1770 brought together several network participants, both core and peripheral: Captain Blake, Robert Chambers, the overseer John Hartnole and Wedderburn.<sup>42</sup> Thistlewood returned Howell's *Travels* to Pommells in January 1775 with “a bunch of asparagus” and two fruit tree nurslings.<sup>43</sup> Burnard has also documented Thistlewood's increasing participation in the parish's political life, activities that engaged book exchange partners, too.<sup>44</sup> No fewer than five of them appeared on the 1779 list of magistrates for Westmoreland.<sup>45</sup> A letter to the island's governor detailing the disastrous situation in Savannah-la-Mar after the hurricane of October 1780 appeared above the signatures of twenty-nine individuals, among them Thistlewood and several partners from the exchange network.<sup>46</sup>

37 Green, ‘Hierarchies of Whiteness’, p. 12.

38 Manley, ‘Rural Reading in Northwest England’, pp. 80–81; Allan, *Nation of Readers*, p. 66; Raven, *London Booksellers*, p. 37. Tadmor's characterisation of the circle of Thomas Turner's friends in England and the importance of reading to them compares well with Thistlewood's situation. Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship and Patronage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 206.

39 MONSON 20/19, 12 June 1768.

40 MONSON 31/20, 23 August 1769.

41 MONSON 31/20, 24 July 1769.

42 MONSON 31/21, 24 February 1770.

43 MONSON 31/26, 11 Jan 1775.

44 Burnard, *Mastery*, pp. 77–79.

45 From a listing of Jamaican magistrates by parish, ‘Almanac and Register for the Island of Jamaica 1779’, <http://www.jamaicanfamilysearch.com/Members/1/1779al03.htm> [accessed 22 January 2017].

46 Documents of the 1780 hurricane, letter to General John Dalling, Governor, 8 October 1780, <http://www.jamaicanfamilysearch.com/Members/1/1780hurricane.htm> [accessed 22 January 2017].

Trust underpinned and enabled these exchanges, and the exchanges in turn enacted and confirmed that trust. Participants even entrusted borrowed books to others for safe return to their owners. Thistlewood entrusted Pommells with one of Wedderburn's books in May 1773.<sup>47</sup> In 1777, Hayward loaned Thistlewood *The Pilgrim*, which Thistlewood sent on to Antrobus through Dr King.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, it is striking how few problems arose. In April 1773, Thistlewood noted that "Mr Graham would force me to account of an old Rochester's Poems".<sup>49</sup> Two years later, Thistlewood had to remind the schoolteacher Mr Fisher to return the fourth volume of *The Adventures of a Bank Note*.<sup>50</sup> Yet such problems were rare and it is significant that Thistlewood did not exchange any more books with Fisher or Graham.

From these exchanges, we can infer the existence of several personal libraries in Thistlewood's neighbourhood. A 1777 inventory Thistlewood made of his own totals nearly 700 titles. His inventory of Hayward's library in 1765 lists 160 discrete titles, a collection that grew in the coming years.<sup>51</sup> It is impossible to know whether any of Thistlewood's partners had collections comparable to or exceeding his own. But his disappointment with his legacy from Pommells – more than fifty titles that he characterised as "sorry trash" – and what he knew the indigo planter owned suggests a substantial collection.<sup>52</sup> The physicians, lawyers and schoolmasters in Thistlewood's network were, of course, professionally obliged to maintain holdings in their specialties, but they also owned and exchanged titles beyond such interests, suggesting more diverse and ample collections. Cope likely purchased what his daughter wanted, too, and Mrs Weech clearly had a collection. Given how long they exchanged books and their variety, Wedderburn must also have had a good-sized library.<sup>53</sup>

The room Thistlewood devoted to his library was not nearly as grand as those that graced the colonial mansions of affluent North Americans. There is

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47 MONSON 31/24, 17 May 1773.

48 MONSON 31/28, 2 September 1777.

49 MONSON 31/24, 23 April 1773.

50 MONSON 31/25, 29 April 1775.

51 My thanks to Erica Munkwitz for having transcribed Thistlewood's manuscript inventory of his own and Hayward's library into a database for me several years ago.

52 For a listing, see Monson 31/81, pp. 106–12.

53 The personal holdings of individuals of diverse professions and different social status in colonial South Carolina and Virginia are suggestive for Jamaicans like Thistlewood and his friends. Walter B. Edgar, 'Notable Libraries of Colonial South Carolina', *The South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 72.2 (1971), pp. 105–10; William S. Simpson, Jr., 'A Comparison of the Libraries of Seven Colonial Virginians, 1754–1789', *The Journal of Library History*, 9.1 (1974), pp. 54–65.



no evidence, either, that it similarly served as a locus of male sociability.<sup>54</sup> But even this more modest library was a considerable advance beyond what a man of relatively humble social origins and an inauspicious early adulthood might have expected. Thistlewood's family had not neglected his education, though it had destined him for animal husbandry. He balked, but failed to establish himself in any other career or to secure a stable and respectable home life in England, so he had little to lose when he came to Jamaica. Once he possessed his own home, Thistlewood created and maintained his library with care; he even ordered his slave Cumberland to paint it twice because he was dissatisfied with his first colour choice.<sup>55</sup> Such fussiness suggests pride of ownership. Indeed, we can imagine him enjoying the same sense of satisfaction described by the scholar Thomas Augst: "Within [the library's] walls, among its shelves of carefully selected and organised volumes, the library created the physical and psychological space for privacy ... and [e]mbod[ied] individual autonomy in the possession of books".<sup>56</sup> Perhaps Pommells, Hayward or Mrs Weech dedicated rooms to their collections. Perhaps they, too, ordered their slaves to build custom shelving as Thistlewood did.<sup>57</sup> Or perhaps they purchased special furnishings such as the "book cases with glass doors" advertised by Bradley and Harrison in a 1765 issue of the *Jamaica Gazette* or the mahogany book case Gilbert Mathison purchased from the estate of the Kingston merchant Alexander Mackintosh in 1747.<sup>58</sup>

Having characterised the network overall, let us examine how it functioned and what types of books its participants exchanged. Table 3.3 and Figures 3.2 and 3.3 document all exchanges between all participants (not just the core) in 1774 and 1775.<sup>59</sup> We also can see from Thistlewood's perspective how a publication came into the network – from choosing and purchasing books to making them available. For both years we see books Thistlewood received from abroad, which he ordered through Henry Hewitt of London and which were delivered

54 Jessica Kross, 'Mansions, Men, Women, and the Creation of Multiple Publics in Eighteenth-Century British North America', *Journal of Social History*, 33.2 (1999), pp. 392–93.

55 MONSON 31/19, 13 March and 16 April 1768.

56 'Introduction', in Thomas Augst and Kenneth E. Carpenter (eds.), *Institutions of Reading: The Social Life of Libraries in the United States* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), pp. 4–5.

57 MONSON 31/19, 7 January 1768.

58 *Jamaica Gazette*, 3 January 1765; Inventory and appraisal of the goods, chattels and rights, and credits of Alexander Mackintosh, late of Kingston, merchant, deceased, 'Inventories and Appraisals 6 from Jamaica Archives', <http://www.jamaicanfamilysearch.com/Members/minvent6.htm> [accessed 22 January 2017].

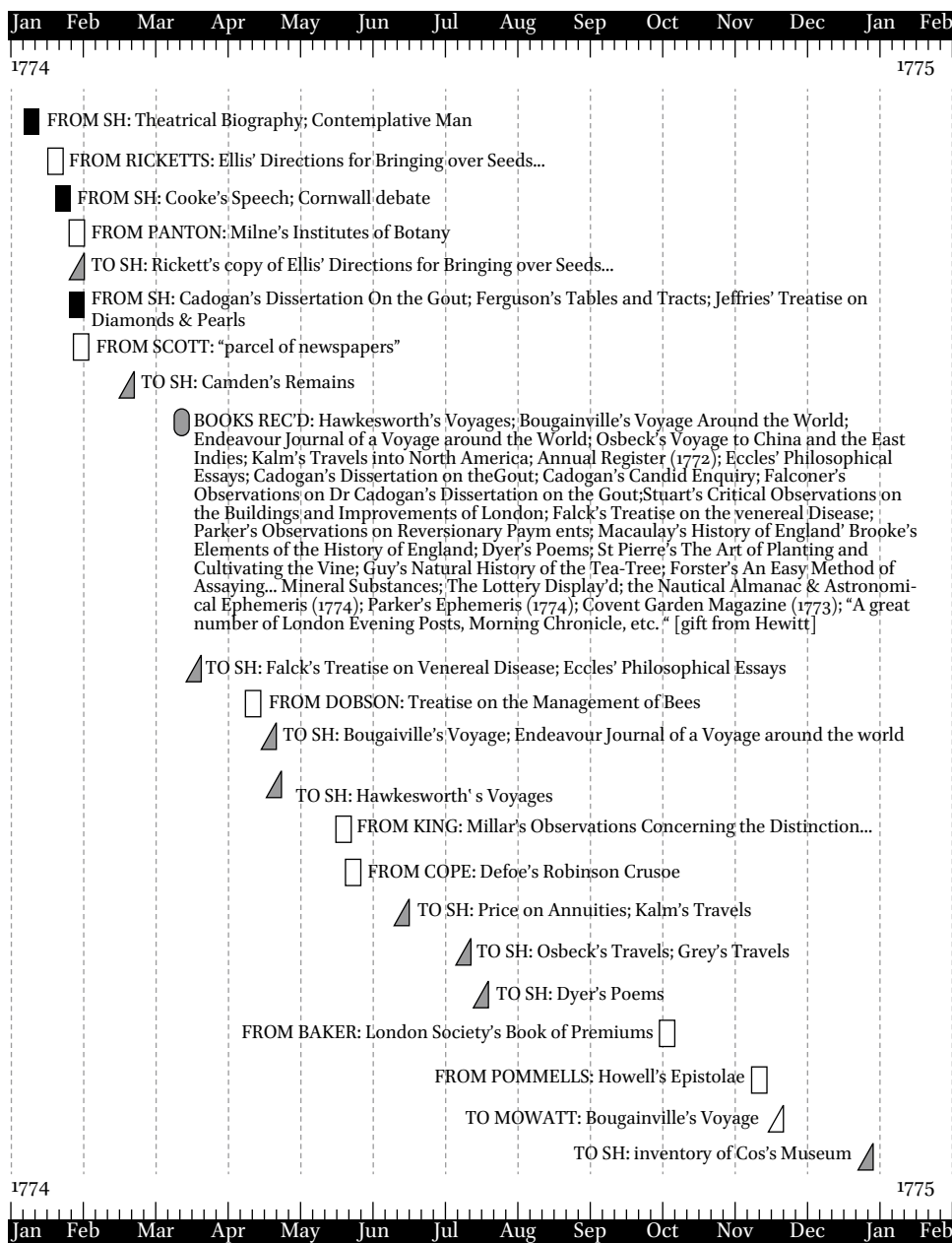
59 Information compiled from MONSON 31/25 (1774) & MONSON 31/26 (1775).

on Captain Richardson's vessel *The Henry* at Savannah-la-Mar. When it came to deciding what to purchase, Thistlewood no doubt had recommendations from friends, and sometimes he liked books he borrowed so much, he purchased his own copies. In 1774, Panton lent him Colin Milne's *Institutes of Botany*, for example, which Thistlewood purchased the following year. Thistlewood also learned about new books from catalogues, several of which he owned.<sup>60</sup> He probably also relied on reviews and excerpts published in periodicals. For example, excerpts from Bougainville's *Voyage*, published in the January 1772 issue of *Gentleman's Magazine* and his borrowing the book from Antrobus in March 1773 might have prompted his purchase in 1774.<sup>61</sup> When Thistlewood circulated new acquisitions, Hayward always had first choice. Thus, he was the first borrower of Bougainville's *Voyage* after Thistlewood received it in spring 1774; four other partners (Mowatt, Antrobus, Panton and Herring) borrowed it soon after. Other titles found borrowers as Thistlewood became more familiar with his partners' tastes. Thus, in 1775 he loaned Richard Dean's *Essay on the Future Life of Brute Creatures* to Polly Cope and Pierre Poivre's *Travels of a Philosopher* to Pommells several years after purchasing them.

Non-fiction dominated Thistlewood's exchange network overall. Thistlewood did purchase literary works such as poetry and novels, but he did not invest as much in them as his friend Hayward, for example. Nor did he have to. He could always borrow a popular novel, as he did *Robinson Crusoe* from John Cope in 1774 and *Tristram Shandy* from Antrobus in 1775. In 1774 and 1775, borrowed titles clustered around horticulture, botany, and natural history (seven), medicine and health (six), travels and voyages (nine), and history (five). Some titles correlated with the lender's professional interests. Physicians had a professional interest in botany, so it is no surprise that Panton loaned Thistlewood Milne's *Institutes* as well as Nicolaus von Jacquin's *Selectarum Stirpium Americanarum Historia* (1763), an account of a collecting expedition to the Caribbean and Spanish America for the Holy Roman Emperor, and Patrick Browne's *A Civil and Natural History of Jamaica* (1756), which focused largely on the island's flora and fauna despite its title. Such loans also indicate the eagerness of Jamaican readers to acquire publications about their home island – and how quickly they obtained them. In January 1775, a sea captain informed Thistlewood of Edward Long's *History of Jamaica*, published in 1774; in December, Thistlewood borrowed it from John Cope; in 1776, he purchased

60 In 1766, he purchased *A Complete Catalogue of Modern Books*. Catalogues from the 1740s, 1750s and 1760s appear in his library inventory as well as an undated listing for a catalogue of maps, prints and books and another for "a large, but imperfect, catalogue of books".

61 *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 52 (February 1772), pp. 57–59.



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FIGURE 3.2 *Thomas Thistlewood's book exchanges, 1774.*

Black rectangles = Samuel Hayward (SH) loan to Thomas Thistlewood (TT); black triangle = Thistlewood loan to Hayward. Clear rectangles and clear triangles = other individuals' loans to Thistlewood and Thistlewood's loans to them, respectively. Clear arrow = exchange other than a loan; grey oval = purchases by Thistlewood.

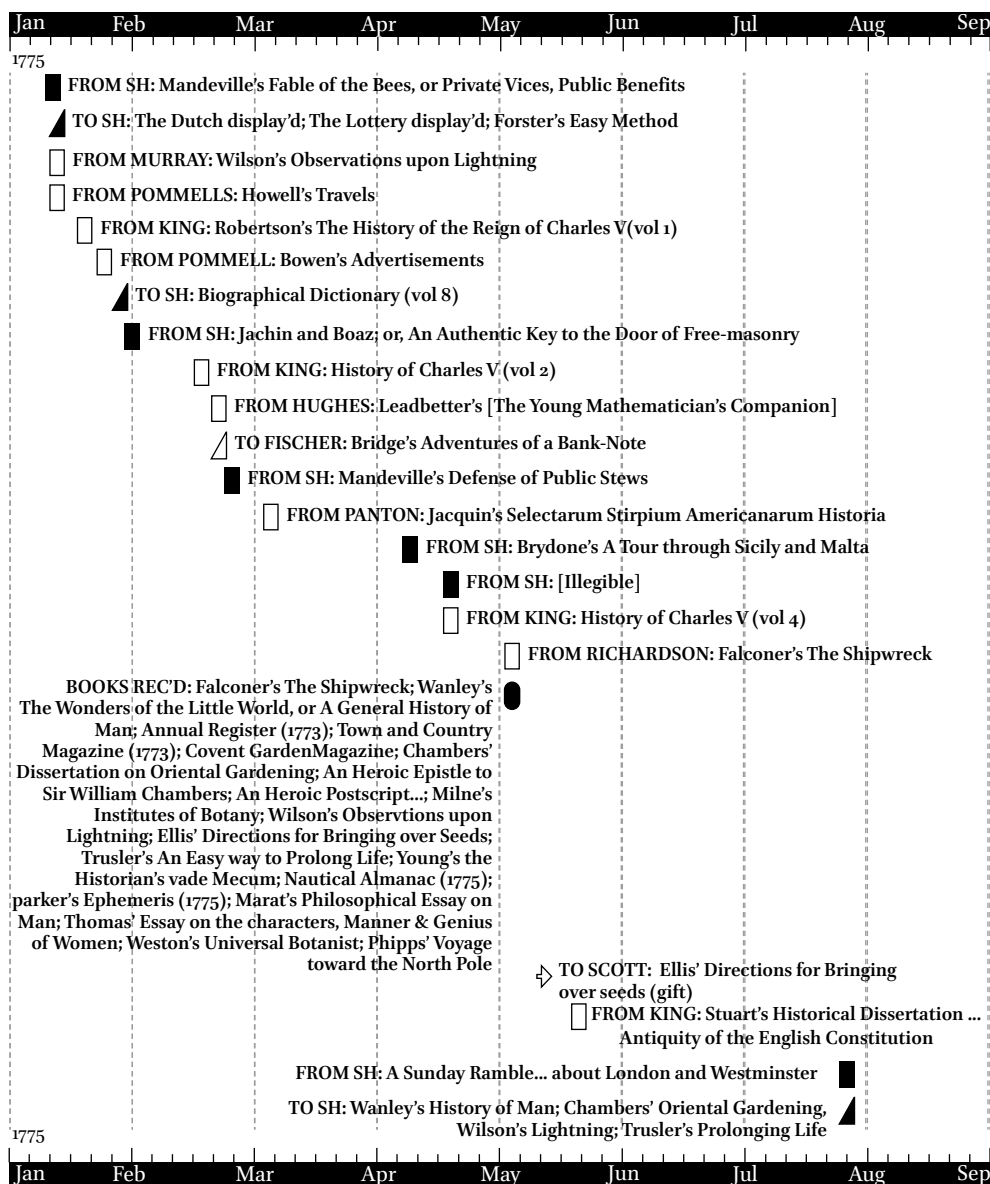


FIGURE 3.3A *Thomas Thistlewood's book exchanges, January–August 1775.*  
 Black rectangles = Samuel Hayward (SH) loan to Thomas Thistlewood (TT);  
 black triangle = Thistlewood loan to Hayward. Clear rectangles and clear triangles = other individuals' loans to Thistlewood and Thistlewood's loans to them, respectively. Clear arrow = exchange other than a loan; grey oval = purchases by Thistlewood.

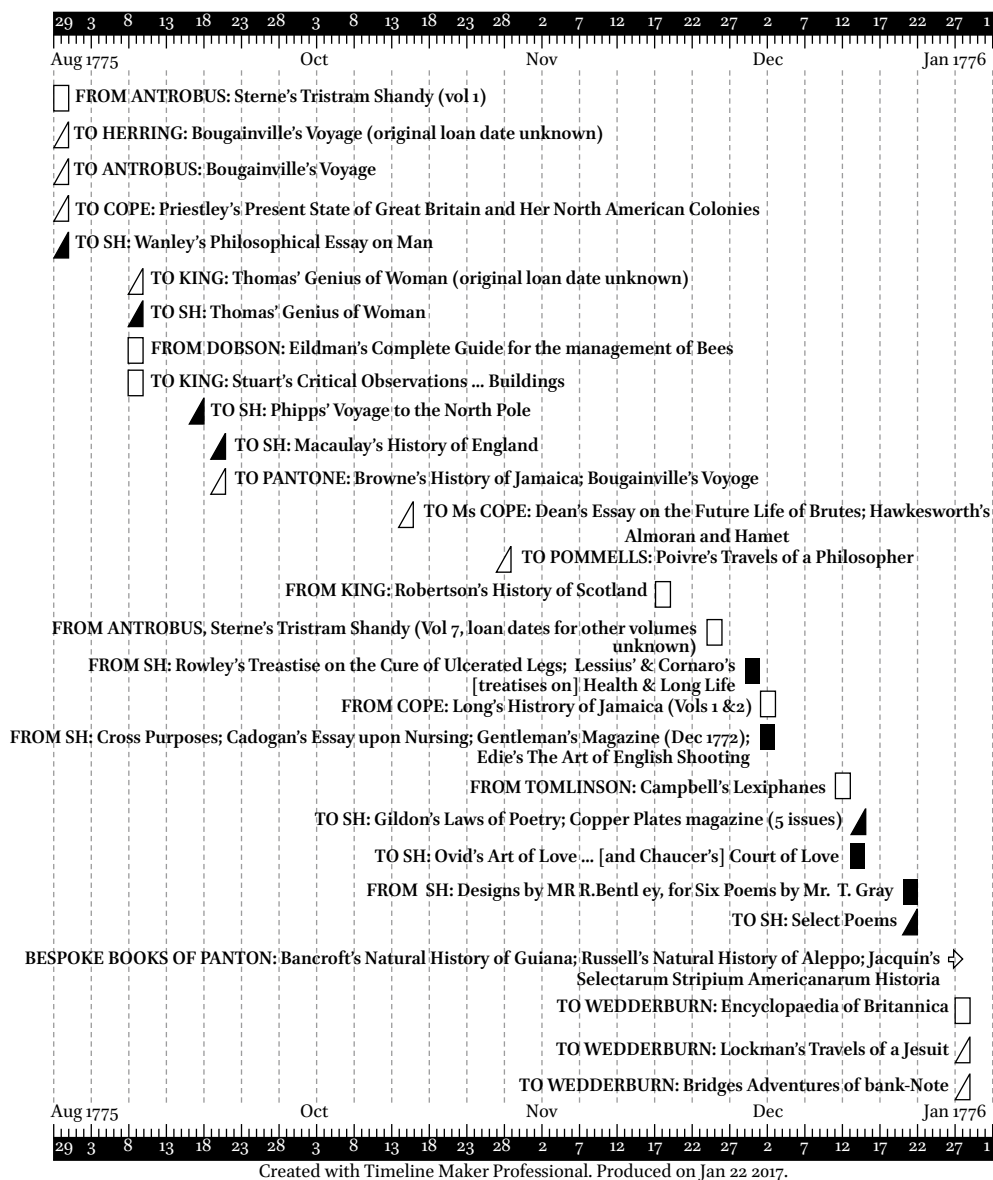


FIGURE 3.3B *Thomas Thistlewood's book exchanges, September–December 1775.*

Black rectangles = Samuel Hayward (SH) loan to Thomas Thistlewood (TT); black triangle = Thistlewood loan to Hayward. Clear rectangles and clear triangles = other individuals' loans to Thistlewood and Thistlewood's loans to them, respectively. Clear arrow = exchange other than a loan; grey oval = purchases by Thistlewood.

his own copy, which he subsequently lent to Hayward and to Mr Little.<sup>62</sup> In contrast, though their exchanges began with a botanical work in 1768,<sup>63</sup> Dr King became Thistlewood's personal librarian, if you will, in the Scottish Enlightenment. In 1771, he borrowed David Hume's *Essays, Moral and Political* and *Political Discourses*; in 1774, John Millar's *Observations concerning the Distinction of Ranks in Society*; in 1775, William Robertson's *The History of the Reign of Emperor Charles v* and *History of Scotland*, together with Gilbert Stuart's *An Historical Dissertation concerning the Antiquity of the English Constitution*; and, in 1777, Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*.<sup>64</sup>

It is noteworthy that some racy, even pornographic material circulated through the network, but very few works on religion or piety. In 1775 we see Thistlewood's receipt of *Covent Garden Magazine*, which contained "sexy stories and advertisements for prostitutes and brothels (including prices)" and which Hayward borrowed in 1776.<sup>65</sup> In 1775, Thistlewood borrowed Bernard Mandeville's *A Modest Defence of Publick Stews; or, An Essay upon Whoring* from Hayward.<sup>66</sup> Given the absence of clergy in the network, the lack of religious titles is unsurprising, though this does distinguish it from metropolitan subscription libraries. At first blush, this would seem to confirm the reputation for godlessness,<sup>67</sup> though we should recall that the network described here reflects Thistlewood's concerns.<sup>68</sup>

Needless to say, Thistlewood did not share such materials with the women in his exchange network, and Polly Cope borrowed the only work authored by a

62 MONSON 31/26, 7 January 1775; MONSON 31/28, 3 January 1777.

63 MONSON 31/19, 5 May 1768.

64 MONSON 31/22, 10 December 1771; MONSON 31/25, 16 May 1774; MONSON 31/26, 18 January and 17 November 1775; MONSON 31/28, 11 May 1777.

65 Thistlewood's book inventory includes the magazine for the years 1772–75. Description from Roy Porter, 'Mixed Feelings: The Enlightenment and Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century Britain', in Paul-Gabriel Boucé (ed.), *Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), p. 8.

66 Long before this, Thistlewood loaned John Armstrong's erotic poem *The Oeconomy of Love* to the planter John Parkinson and borrowed John Cleland's *Fanny Hill* from Hayward. MONSON 31/15, note at beginning of his journal for 1764; Commonplace book, MONSON 31/73, 114/115. Most interesting was Vincent Miller's *The Man-Plant: or, Scheme for Improving and Increasing the British Breed* (1752), a thorough-going satire of science in the service of empire which Thistlewood inherited from Say in 1773. Monson 31/24, 24 May 1773.

67 For an excellent discussion of the situation of the Church of England in Jamaica and the island's religious tone, see B.W. Higman, *Proslavery Priest: The Atlantic World of John Lindsay, 1720–1788* (Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2011), Chapter six, pp. 102–40.

68 Thistlewood did in fact have some interest in religious issues, though his commonplace books suggest an original bent and that he prized independent thinking over confessional allegiance or orthodoxy. See Shelford, 'Pascal in Jamaica'.

divine during these two years, that is, Dean's *Essay*, which rejected materialism and predestination. Yet the women who participated in his exchange network were so few in number, it is difficult to generalise about them much beyond the obvious. Given the female taste for novels, for example, it is unexceptional that Polly Cope lent Thistlewood one in May 1772.<sup>69</sup> Thistlewood judged her "sensibler" than other acquaintances,<sup>70</sup> which probably made him more willing to share books with her. In 1775, he lent her an orientalisising moralistic tale, John Hawkesworth's *Almorán and Hamet*, along with Dean's *Essay*. Mrs Weech was the only participant besides Hayward to benefit much more from Thistlewood than he did from others, though she apparently either had left the area or died by the years covered by Table 3.3 or Figures 3.2 and 3.3. Earlier activity indicates eclectic interests. She borrowed historical titles (John Entick's *The General History of the Late War* from 1768 into 1769), two popularisations of astronomy (Fontenelle's *Plurality of Worlds* and Lewis's *Astronomical Dialogues* in 1768), and a novel (Johnstone's novel *The Reverie* in 1769).<sup>71</sup> They exchanged periodicals the most, though, with the number she loaned Thistlewood greatly outnumbering his to her. These included *Town and Country Magazine*, *Public Ledger*, *Gentleman's Magazine* and *London Magazine*.<sup>72</sup>

Though especially prominent in Thistlewood's exchanges with Mrs Weech, periodicals figured often enough in the network and were well represented in Thistlewood's library – indeed, he arrived in Jamaica with copies of the *Spectator*, *Tatler* and *Guardian*.<sup>73</sup> From 1768 through 1777, many other periodicals and annuals circulated, including the *Annual Register*, *London Magazine*, *Public Ledger*, *The Babler*, *Gentleman's Magazine*, *Critical Review*, *Wonderful Magazine* and *Copper Plate Magazine*. Most periodicals originally published as discrete numbers circulated in their bound versions. They were fairly current, if not of the preceding year, though Hughes's loan of the 1766 *London Magazine* shows that older periodicals could circulate, too. Through periodicals, Thistlewood and his partners had access to a "cornucopia of secular information, instant opinion and urbane values", as well as a "welter of essays, *belles lettres* and novels".<sup>74</sup> On the one hand, there was the *Annual Register*, which "enjoyed a reputation as a highly objective publication that provided

69 MONSON 31/23, 22 May 1772.

70 MONSON 31/25, 23 June 1774.

71 MONSON 31/20, 26 January 1769; MONSON 31/19, 19 July 1768; MONSON 31/20, 5 May 1769.

72 MONSON 31/21, 23 January 1770; MONSON 31/22, 17 June 1771; MONSON 31/23, 11 April 1772.

73 MONSON 31/85, fol. 15.

74 Roy Porter, *Enlightenment: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 94.

expansive information”,<sup>75</sup> and which Thistlewood ordered nearly every year. On the other, there was *Town and Country Magazine*, whose “trademarks were celebrity sexual exposés and transcripts from adultery trials”,<sup>76</sup> which he ordered from 1769 through 1773. Other publications staked out a middle road. In a borrowed January 1772 issue of *London Magazine*, Thistlewood could read about the character of the Russians, anecdotes of Dr Johnson, the conclusion of *The Infidel Pastor* (“whose protagonist was a slave of passions and caprice”) and the “absurd” way the French managed their trade and manufactures. In a borrowed January 1772 issue of *Gentleman’s Magazine*, he found the “Meteorological Diary”, which resembled those he kept in Jamaica,<sup>77</sup> an article on tesserae from the recent excavations of Herculaneum and a refutation of Voltaire’s characterisation of the ancient Hebrews as savages. In contrast, the intellectual project of *Copper Plate Magazine*, which Thistlewood purchased for three years, appears to have fostered cultural literacy by combining visual and verbal representations of estimable men, historical moments, worthy edifices such as stately aristocratic country homes and scenes from classical mythology, and the wildly popular, though relentlessly moralising, *Telemachus* by François Fénelon.

To summarise this brief survey of Thistlewood’s book exchange network: it combined independence and cooperation to create an ad hoc community library that made available reasonably up-to-date publications efficiently. It differed from book clubs, which were a popular option for smaller communities in the metropole,<sup>78</sup> because participants were free to purchase as they liked and could afford. Unlike subscription libraries, it required no physical infrastructure, charged no annual fee, and had no written statutes, meetings or officers. All it required was a stock of books, a willingness to lend and the conscientious return of borrowed materials. It employed a simple behaviour – borrowing and lending – to transform private into collective goods. It offered its participants a greater quantity and diversity of reading matter – from the scandalous to the intellectually sophisticated – than they could acquire on

75 Merethe Roos, ‘Struensee in Britain: The Interpretation of the Struensee Affair in British Periodicals, 1772’, in Ellen Krefting, Aina Nøding and Mona Ringvej (eds.), *Eighteenth-Century Periodicals as Agents of Change: Perspectives on Northern Enlightenment* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), p. 82.

76 Ibid., p. 89.

77 His meteorological information is the basis of Michael Chenoweth, *The Eighteenth-Century Climate of Jamaica Derived from the Journals of Thomas Thistlewood, 1750–1786* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2003).

78 Allan, *Nation of Readers*, Chapter two, pp. 24–61.



their own. In short, it exploited creatively that penchant for independence noted by Burnard, though also significantly qualifies it.

But people in the eighteenth century did not purchase books just to read them; nor did they read simply (or even principally) to be edified or titillated, to gather useful information or even just to stave off boredom. Books were a commodity whose acquisition signalled status and gentility. It is serendipitous, but significant, that Hayward's copies of Bayle's *Biographical Dictionary* and Bacon's *Works* arrived in February 1769 in a shipment that also included a harpsichord, flute, silver soup ladle and half-a-dozen silver table spoons.<sup>79</sup> Books were supposed to provide the grist for conversation at the dinner table set with that shiny, new cutlery. Samuel Johnson had urged a female friend to read *The Tatler* because "[t]hey are part of the books which every body should read, because they are the sources of conversation".<sup>80</sup> As historian Richard Bushman writes of the North American colonies, "Reading raised a person's conversation above the boorish talk of rustics ... Conversation gave a social point to books".<sup>81</sup>

Thistlewood's journal notes such 'polite' social gatherings, though he unfortunately recorded little of the conversation. Did Hughes share with Thistlewood what he claimed to know personally about "Johnson the author of the noted Dictionary", in a discussion of their latest reading?<sup>82</sup> What prompted John Prynold to tell him he had it on "excellent authority" that the breadfruit illustration in Anson's *Voyage* was inaccurate at a dinner hosted by Pommells in April 1769?<sup>83</sup> In January 1778, when Mr Hytton came calling, did he bring his copy of *The Sentiments of a Foreigner on the Disputes of Great Britain and America* to lend as a follow-up to an earlier conversation?<sup>84</sup> Did a discussion of Guthrie's *Sentimental Friends* at the Copes in May 1722 prompt Thistlewood to borrow the novel from Polly and read it for himself?<sup>85</sup> Did Thistlewood send a volume of Voltaire's poetry to her and "Miss Hannah" because it fittingly concluded a conversation over Sunday tea in November 1778?<sup>86</sup> However scarce, however merely suggestive such evidence, it strains credulity to think that

79 MONSON 31/20, 7 February 1769.

80 Robert DeMaria, Jr., *Samuel Johnson and the Life of Reading* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 147.

81 Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America* (New York: Knopf, 1992), p. 88; also see David S. Shields, 'Eighteenth-Century Literary Culture', in *Amory and Hall, History of the Book in America, Volume 1*, p. 448.

82 MONSON 31/19, 31 October 1768.

83 MONSON 31/73, 204/232.

84 MONSON 31/29, 9 January 1778.

85 MONSON 31/23, 22 May 1772.

86 MONSON 31/29, 1 November 1778.

Thistlewood and his friends would not have discussed the books they worked hard and spent much to acquire and exchange. Such discussions likely occurred at gatherings that showcased other interests of a cultural or intellectual nature. Thus, in December 1775 Thistlewood demonstrated his “large telescope” by fixing it on Saturn after a dinner at Egypt Estate that included Cope, Polly, Miss Hannah and Wilson, a minor participant in the exchange network.<sup>87</sup> In April 1773, at the Weech’s, “Miss Cook play’d us many tunes on the harpsichord, and sang also: Captain George Richardson, and Miss Polly Cope there”.<sup>88</sup>

In short, books and reading meant the same things for the Jamaicans we have encountered here as they did to colonists in North America and their metropolitan counterparts – a seemingly obvious point, but worth making because descriptions of eighteenth-century Jamaica inevitably, if rightly, accentuate those features that made it so different from the metropole. The Georgian “collective obsession” for reading did not have to leap the Atlantic; Thistlewood and many of his friends brought it with them.<sup>89</sup> They bought books because they brought status and because ideas mattered; they discussed them because conversation demonstrated gentility; and they housed them carefully, however grand or modest their circumstances, because a library was “a handsome ornament” that “a gentleman should not be without”.<sup>90</sup> Yet because Thistlewood and his neighbours were colonists, books and the practices associated with them took on added significance, as with their counterparts to the north. Jennifer Mylander has written that the circulation of books in the seventeenth-century Atlantic world “responded to the needs of [seventeenth-century North American] colonists to participate in authentic Englishness”; writing of eighteenth-century Charleston, Raven has termed American book imports as “lifelines of identity ... direct material links to a present and past European culture”.<sup>91</sup>

Nevertheless, the participants in the book exchange network described here lived in a social and natural environment utterly foreign to metropolitans and one not wholly replicated in North America, even in the more southern

87 MONSON 31/26, 27 Dec 1775.

88 MONSON 31/23, 15 April 1772.

89 Allan, *Nation of Readers*, p. 1.

90 Quoting Daniel Defoe’s *The Compleat English Gentleman*; Michal J. Rozbicki, ‘A Barrier or a Bridge to American Identity? The Uses of European Taste among Eighteenth-Century Plantation Gentry in British America’, *Amerikanstudien / American Studies*, 42.3 (1997), p. 446.

91 Jennifer Mylander, ‘Early Modern “How-to” Books: Impractical Manuals and the Construction of Englishness in the Atlantic World’, *The Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 9.1 (2009), p. 138; Raven, *London Booksellers*, p. 7.

colonies. Here violence was not merely frequent, but the weft in the fabric of social life. The politeness of Thistlewood's taking tea with the ladies does not occlude occasions of male sociability centred around drinking that might well lead to seeking a female slave to gang rape.<sup>92</sup> In this context, how much more compelling the need to practice the gentle art of conversation, "restraining people's wilder passions, smoothing out their prejudices and quieting their mutual hostility"?<sup>93</sup> Imagining Thistlewood and his friends, bent over *The Copper Plate Magazine* and inspecting the portraits of important men and depictions of stately homes and their magnificent gardens may strike us as cognitively dissonant at best, grotesque at worst. But perhaps this was precisely the point: books created a social space and identity not defined by violence. In short, reading figured in a different "politics of culture" in this new "creole" society,<sup>94</sup> one in which "a colonial polity reacts, as a whole to external metropolitan pressures, and at the same time to internal adjustments made necessary by the juxtaposition of master and slave, elite and labourer, in a culturally heterogeneous relationship".<sup>95</sup> Literacy and its conspicuous display through reading, acquiring, exchanging, and discussing books distinguished Thistlewood and his friends from, on the one hand, the mass of slaves who surrounded them and, on the other, a metropole that condemned Caribbean philistinism and barbarism. The social practices of books and reading redrew a line smudged by sex, dependency and domestic intimacy, helping to legitimate on a cultural basis the awesome power of white over black and to assert colonial worth against metropolitan disdain.

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92 Burnard, *Mastery*, pp. 82–83.

93 Allan, 'Politeness and the Politics of Culture', p. 164; see also Stephen Miller, *Conversation: A History of a Declining Art* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), Chapter 4, pp. 79–118.

94 The phrase "politics of culture" from David Hall, *Cultures of Print: Essays in the History of the Book* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), p. 153.

95 Edward Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770–1820* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. xvi.

## Affleck Generations: The Libraries of the Boswells of Auchinleck, 1695–1825

*James J. Caudle*\*

As the ends of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations, it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born.<sup>1</sup>

EDMUND BURKE

• • •

I consider a public sale as the most laudable method of disposing of it. From such sales my books were chiefly collected, and when I can no longer use them they will be again culled by various buyers according to the measure of their wants and means ... [I do not intend] to bury my treasure in a *country* mansion under the key of a jealous master! I am not flattered by the [idea which you propose of the] Gibbonian collection.<sup>2</sup>

EDWARD GIBBON

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These two quotations from two acquaintances of James Boswell (1740–95) suggest an essential tension in eighteenth-century private libraries, between the

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\* This work emerged from over five years of collaboration with Terry Seymour, as well as Jerry Morris and his team, on identifying Boswell's books. Much of the work on this chapter was done while on a Fleeman Fellowship at the University of St Andrews in spring 2016. There, I benefitted from discussions with David Allan and Tom Jones, and the comments by the English Research Seminar Series to whom I presented a version of this chapter.

1 *The Beauties of the Late Right Hon. Edmund Burke ... In Two Volumes* (London: printed by J.W. Myers, and sold by W. West, 1798), ii. 367.

2 Edward Gibbon to Lord Sheffield, 30 May 1792, in Rowland E. Prothero, *Private Letters of Edward Gibbon (1753–1794)*, 2 vols. (London, J. Murray, 1896), ii. 300–301; James Westfall Thompson, 'The Library of Gibbon the Historian', *The Library Quarterly*, 7:3 (July 1937), pp. 343–353.

ambitions of a museum-like permanence and longevity across the centuries on one hand, and the rights of heirs to dispose of such a collection on the other. One side of this argument presumed that an inheritor of a carefully crafted family library had a communitarian obligation to his kin to perpetuate it in a stable state, at the bare minimum, and perhaps even a tacit duty to expand it with well-chosen books for his descendants' benefit. The other side argued that the heir to a familial library was an unrestricted free-agent who might sell his ancestors' books without compunction if they did not suit his personal tastes (or if he was himself not bookish, preferred horses or billiards to the parental tomes, or simply needed to raise some money). Imbedded within this debate is a broader cultural argument over whether the country house library – excusing the false dichotomy and the anachronistic adjectives – was a 'feudal' or a 'capitalist' enterprise; whether it was predicated on indissoluble and infeasible legal and moral bonds, or on negotiable contract fungible in each new generation.

Beyond the questions associated with the obligation – or lack of obligation – to maintain the library in good order for future generations of the same family, the various generations of owners of a great private library had to consider the duty they owed to the community, whether in country or in town.<sup>3</sup> This duty, for those who acknowledged or admitted its existence, was not prescriptive or statutory; one could not point to any law on the statute-books of Scotland or England which argued for it. (I am not even aware of courtesy and etiquette books of the Georgian period setting rules demanding it as a condition of genteel neighbourliness.) Some country house library owners felt themselves obliged to let neighbours consult the books in the house, duty-bound to lend to local residents, impelled to allow scholarly editors to access rare books and manuscripts for publication, or compelled to share through donation from their collections with public or guild libraries.<sup>4</sup> Yet others argued, to

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3 There is a large and growing scholarly literature on private libraries in the period 1650–1850; for recent examples, see Mark Purcell, 'The Private Library in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Surrey', *Library History*, 19.2 (2003), pp. 119–127; Ed Potten, 'Beyond Bibliophilia: Contextualising Private Libraries in the Nineteenth Century', *Library & Information History*, 31.2 (2015), pp. 73–94; and James Raven, 'Debating Bibliomania and the Collection of Books in the Eighteenth Century', *Library & Information History*, 29.3 (2013), pp. 196–209.

4 For some of these community-based notions of the private library in Scotland, see Mark Towsey, "'The Talent hid in a Napkin': Castle Libraries in Scotland, 1770–1830", in Katie Halsey and W.R. Owens (eds.), *The History of Reading, Volume 2: Evidence from the British Isles, c. 1750–1950* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 15–31; for recent consideration of community use of a prestigious town library, see Graham Jefcoate, 'Mr Cavendish's Librarian: Charles Heydinger and the Library of Henry Cavendish', *Library & Information History*, 32.1–2 (2016), pp. 58–71.

the contrary, that it should be plausible for a library's owner simply to use the private library as a refuge from the community, a hiding place, rather than as a nexus with it.<sup>5</sup> This chapter considers these debates as they relate to three generations of the Boswell family (1695–1822), taking care to consider both the family estate at Auchinleck, but also their various townhouses in Edinburgh and London. I suggest that the private family library was a multi-locational institution, whose cultural meanings changed from one generation to the next, but which increasingly came to be considered a valuable part of the family's – and the wider community's – heritage in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

### The Boswells of Auchinleck in Ayrshire, Edinburgh and London

Readers are most likely to associate the Boswells of Auchinleck with the name of James Boswell, the author of the *Life of Samuel Johnson* and various journals of his own life, of which the 'London' journal of 1762–63 is now the most famous, though one of the least characteristic. Successive generations of the Boswell family before and after developed ideas of dynastic and community obligations regarding their country house library at Auchinleck in rural Ayrshire.

Any assessment of the Boswell family's activities in library building, acquisition, management and dispersion in this period of 130 years is complicated by a number of issues. First, the survival of documents relating to the acquisition, storage, display and use of books by members of the Boswell family is uneven and fragmentary. Second, there is not simply one stable 'Boswell Library' to account for. In its period of flowering (1695–1822), Auchinleck's collection existed in symbiosis with individual family members' town house collections in Edinburgh (c. 1698–1786) and in London (c. 1786–1822), as well as travelling collections of books hauled around on the Grand Tour in the 1690s, 1720s and 1760s. As Figure 4.1 demonstrates, these libraries existed in the plural, in country and in town, circulating into and out of each other.

Third, all of the library catalogues made up either by owners or by auctioneers are incomplete, and some surviving association-copies located by Terry Seymour appear in none of the manuscript or printed sources.<sup>6</sup> Having

5 Jessica Kross suggests that for many American gentlemen of this period, the library was "the most private part of the house"; Jessica Kross, 'Mansions, Men, Women, and the Creation of Multiple Publics in Eighteenth-Century British North America', *Journal of Social History*, 33.2 (1999), pp. 385–408, at p. 394.

6 James J. Caudle, 'Preface', in Terry Seymour, *Boswell's Books: Four Generations Of Collecting and Collectors* (New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press, 2016), pp. 9–16; Jacob Jost, 'Establishing the

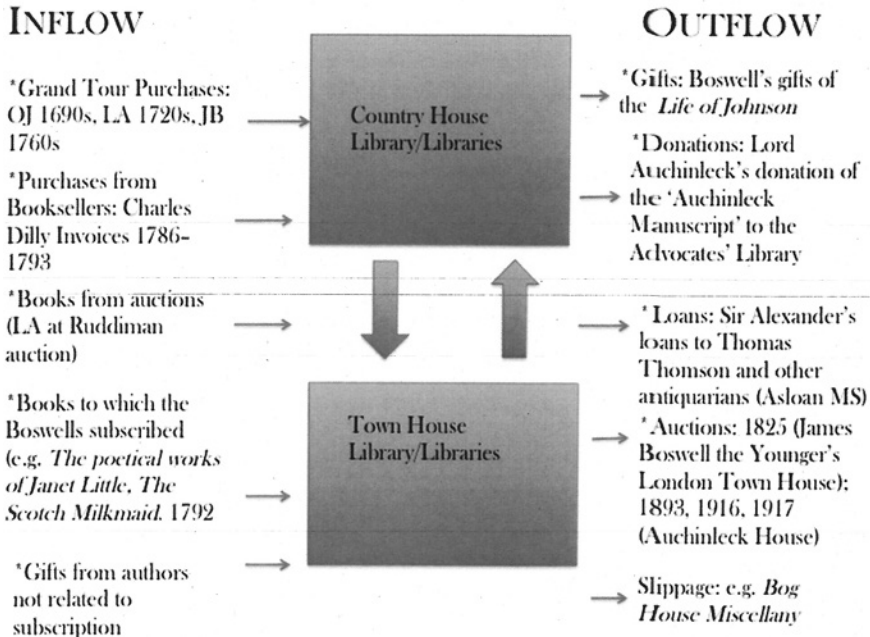


FIGURE 4.1 Inflow/Outflow diagram of Boswell libraries.

made all of these demurrals, I still believe that it is possible to speak of the Boswells' library at Auchinleck as being one of the most fully knowable and best-documented country house libraries in Britain for the period 1695-1825, even though it has long since been dispersed from its original home and was never bequeathed *en bloc* to an institutional library, as Samuel Pepys's or David Dalrymple's books were.

The bulk of the manuscript evidence about the contents and the use of the Auchinleck collection and its allied Edinburgh and London collections is held in Yale's Beinecke Library, the National Library of Scotland and the National Records of Scotland. The unique combination in these archives of purchaser- and vendor-generated sales information, entails, inventories, wills, fragments of provisional catalogues intended for the owner's personal use (and secondarily for visitors' perusal), personal correspondence between owners and their relatives and friends, the biographer Boswell's famous journals and auction catalogues from 1825 to 1976, offers an unusual and perhaps uniquely fleshed-out view of how a country-house library worked (although records of borrowing of the sort which one occasionally finds for other houses have not thus far been located). None of these pieces of evidence records all volumes in the

entire collection in a snapshot, but the various fragments, when collated, do tell a fairly complete story.

Previous scholarly discussions of the Boswellian libraries have guided my analysis. In 2016, Terry Seymour's definitive bibliography of the books associated with the Boswells of Auchinleck created a solid foundation for all future discussions of the biographer Boswell's libraries, a topic previously addressed at length only in an unpublished but highly-respected dissertation by Eleanor Terry Lincoln.<sup>7</sup> The preface and introduction to the Seymour catalogue explain comprehensively how we know what we know about the Boswells' books, and tells the story of the various scholars who worked on reconstructing the details.<sup>8</sup> Important works by David Buchanan and Frederick Pottle explore the tangle of entails, wills, auctions and court battles about the properties of the Boswells of Auchinleck. Though their chief purpose was to explain the odyssey of Boswell's private papers, Buchanan and Pottle offer a great deal of detail on bequests in general, including books.<sup>9</sup> These foundational works were all chiefly focused on the biographer Boswell, and all of them, from Lincoln to Seymour, strove to uncover knowledge about his library to help explain his journals, letters and published works.

In contrast to these impressive studies, my own interest in this material stems from a desire to use the Boswell libraries' evidence to answer broader questions about how private libraries functioned in Georgian Britain, and how such collections reflected beliefs among aristocrats and gentry about the intergenerational continuity of their landed estates. The combined sources at Beinecke, the NLS and elsewhere reveal something incredibly difficult to uncover in any detail for similar country house libraries: that is, their creators' and inheritors' views on why the library existed, and what ought to be done with it by future generations. Unlike public libraries of the period, private libraries did not issue prospectuses, rules or manifestos of foundational principles, so one must seek the rationales and explanations in correspondence and in diaries.<sup>10</sup>

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7 Seymour, *Boswell's Books*; Eleanor Terry Lincoln, 'James Boswell: Reader and Critic', unpublished PhD thesis, Yale University, 1938.

8 Terry Seymour, 'Introduction', *Boswell's Books*, pp. 27–72.

9 David Buchanan, *The Treasure of Auchinleck: The Story of the Boswell Papers* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974); Frederick A. Pottle, *Pride and Negligence: The History of the Boswell Papers* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982).

10 Yale University, Boswell MS P33, *Cornwall Country Library*, Truro, 25 October 1792; Boswell MS P34, *County Library &c. Rules and Observations*. My references to Boswell MS use the document-numbering system created for Marion S. Pottle, Claude Collier Abbott and Frederick A. Pottle (eds.), *Catalogue of the Papers of James Boswell at Yale University*,



TABLE 4.1 *Generations of Boswell book collectors, with abbreviated forms of reference used in this chapter.*


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James (c.1676–1749), seventh laird from 1713 ('Old James')
Alexander (1707–82), eighth laird from 1749 ('Lord Auchinleck')
James (1740–95), ninth laird from 1782 ('JB')
Alexander (1775–1822), tenth laird from 1795 ('Sandie') and James (1778–1822) his brother ('Jamie')
Sir James (1807–57), eleventh laird from 1822 ('Sir James'), who in 1852 broke the entail of 1776 in order for his widow and daughters to inherit.

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The story of the book collections of the Boswells of Auchinleck spans at least four generations. Extensive manuscript evidence begins in the middle 1690s, with the collecting of 'Old James' Boswell on his Grand Tour (see Table 4.1). In the early and mid- Georgian period, his son and successor, Alexander Boswell (better known as Lord Auchinleck, having gained that title *ex officio* as a 'Lord of Seat' on the benches of the two highest Scottish courts, rather than as a hereditary peer) collected books energetically, from his student days on the Continent and in London in the 1720s into his final decades. Lord Auchinleck was generally seen as the founder of the library. He even constructed a very large and lofty purpose-built room in his Adam-style house (built in the late 1750s and early 1760s) for his and his ancestors' books (see Figure 4.2). The narrative of the collection's rise and decline pivots on a less important book-collector than Lord Auchinleck, his son James Boswell the biographer ('JB'), a very important diarist, letter-writer and author in George III's reign. The period surveyed draws towards a close with the collecting of JB's sons Alexander Boswell ('Sandie') at Auchinleck and James Boswell the Younger ('Jamie') in London in the 1810s and early 1820s. The golden age of Auchinleck's library ends with the sale of Jamie's London books in 1825, and the stagnation of the Auchinleck collection, so carefully enhanced by Sandie, after his unexpected death from an injury sustained in a duel. Sandie's son, Sir James Boswell, more keen on horses than on books, was master of the library from the end of the Regency into the start of the mid-Victorian period. Subsequent generations presided over the

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3 vols. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993). Citations of Boswell's *Tour to the Hebrides* and *Life of Johnson* appear simply as 'Life', and are all from George Birkbeck Hill (ed.), rev. and enl. by L.F. Powell (ed.), *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934–1950), 2nd ed., vols. 5–6 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964).

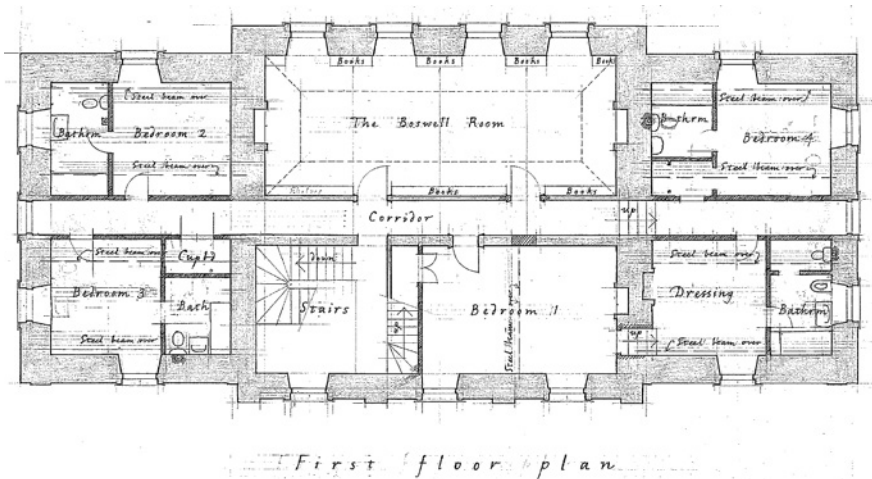


FIGURE 4.2 *Detail from site plan of Auchinleck House, showing the placement of the 'Boswell Room' (former Library-Room), before restoration redevelopment by Landmark Trust.*

BLUEPRINT PREPARED BY ERITH AND TERRY, ARCHITECTS, DEDHAM, COLCHESTER, 17 MARCH 1978.

dismemberment of the library by auctions in the period 1893–1917, and to broker the sale of Auchinleck House to another family.<sup>11</sup>

### The Dynastic Idiom in the Country House Library

From 1695–1825, but especially after 1782, the Boswell family increasingly came to conceptualise Auchinleck's library as a permanent family asset. This vision of the library as something which had to be preserved had, as its foundation, the concept of family endurance which so captured JB's imagination. JB reflected in 1775,

How strange is it, then, that a man will toil all his life and deny himself satisfactions in order to aggrandize his posterity after he is dead. It is, I fancy, from a kind of delusion in the imagination, which makes us figure ourselves contemplating for ages our own magnificence in a succession of descendants. So strong is this delusion with me that I would suffer

11 The house is now maintained as a self-catering holiday property by the Landmark Trust. The selection of books in the refurbished library room at the time of writing is not based on any extant catalogue of the library, but is instead a curators' pick meant for the education and amusement of those letting the house.

death rather than let the estate of Auchinleck be sold; and this must be from an enthusiasm for an idea for the Family. The founder of it I never saw, so how can I be zealous for his race? and were I to be a martyr, I should only be reckoned a madman. But an idea will produce the highest enthusiasm.<sup>12</sup>

A collection of books which originated mostly in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth century could never be equal in emotional import to the baronial lands dating back to the early sixteenth century, of course. We cannot imagine JB, who called himself “an old feudal Goth”, asserting his “old Gothic Salic male enthusiasm” over old books and manuscripts in the same way that he did over the various farms which his eldest son would inherit.<sup>13</sup> Nor was there any imaginable way that even the richest library of rare and unique books could produce a robust or even a variable flow of rental income as the leased farms did. As far as we know, a country house library never produced any income at all, except when it was dismantled at auction.

And yet, JB studiously entailed Lord Auchinleck’s classics and antique manuscripts, despite his near-constant strife with his father and their cold, distant relationship. This insistence on the entail is even more peculiar when one considers that the historian of the Boswell family papers, David Buchanan, pointed out that an entail of moveable property was probably unenforceable nonsense in Scots Law: the same Scots Law which JB had studied and been called to the bar in.<sup>14</sup> That entail of Lord Auchinleck’s classics and rare manuscripts created a sense among most of JB’s children that the books of their grandfather and great-grandfather, and by implication of their father, ought to be preserved for the family rather than shipped out to auction houses.

Interestingly, we do not have much evidence of this insistence on patrimony until Lord Auchinleck’s time, despite Old James having been a careful collector. After the death of his wife Elizabeth in 1734, Old James “truly retired, and lived on his lands [at Auchinleck], where he lived a very simple life”.<sup>15</sup> In these final years, as his world narrowed around him, the books in the 1610s Jacobean

12 Journal, 31 December 1775, in Charles Ryskamp and Frederick A. Pottle (eds.), *Boswell: The Ominous Years, 1774–1776* (New York: McGraw Hill; London: Heinemann, 1963), p. 208.

13 James Boswell to Bennet Langton, October 1775, in Charles N. Fifer (ed.), *The Correspondence of James Boswell with Certain Members of the Club* (London: Heinemann; New York: McGraw Hill, 1976); Journal, 6 August 1776, in Charles McC. Weis and Frederick A. Pottle (eds.), *Boswell in Extremes, 1776–1778* (New York: McGraw Hill; London: Heinemann, 1970), p. 19.

14 Buchanan, *Treasure*, p. 196, n. 7.

15 Peter Martin, *A Life of James Boswell* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 28–29; Boswell MS L1108, ‘Ebauche de ma Vie’, unfinished first draft.

turret-house (later known, as it gradually fell into ruins after 1765, as 'The Old Place') would have been a large part of what remained after he had abandoned the legal profession in Edinburgh and his lawyer's town house there. The question of where Old James's books went after his death in 1749 remains unsolved. Did some of them go to the family of his learned son Dr John Boswell (1710–80), Lord Auchinleck's younger brother, who was himself a distinguished Edinburgh professional, serving as President of the Royal College of Physicians in 1770–72? That is a possibility, given the specialist scope of many of the books Old James had collected. However, some of Old James's books were probably still in the family's possession when JB died in London in 1795, since we find Sandie writing in January 1796 to his sister Euphemia "begging of her to keep ... at all events the Books as some of them belonged to my Great Grandfather [Old James]".<sup>16</sup> Thus, whether he or not he intended it, Old James's books were treated as a treasured legacy by the literary-minded last generation.

Lord Auchinleck's correspondence does not reveal a great deal about his personal vision for the library. Although his letters to his son show he was an eloquent correspondent, and not the gruff laconic spartan of Boswellian myth, the majority of what we can discern of his goals and aims is found within legal documents, perhaps fittingly for a man who devoted his life to the service of the law. Although the library was not specifically mentioned in the preamble to Lord Auchinleck's entail of 1776, he outlined quite clearly the estate, and its ideological as well as fiscal purpose. In that document, he wrote,

[T]he Estate which I have[,] thoug[h] not great[,] is sufficient for answering all the reasonable Expences of a gentlemans family[,] and is situate in an agreeable Country with the people of which I and my worthy predecesso[rs] have had the happiness to li[ve] in great friendship which I ho[pe] shall always be the case wit[h] those that succeed me and the place of residence has many unco[mmon] beauties & conveniencies which sa[id] considerations would make any wise man careful to preserve such an Estate.

He explained earlier in the document that,

The settlement I am to make is a Tailzie or Deed of Entail intended to be perpetual[;] which notwithstanding the prejudices of the ignorant and dissipated part of mankind to the contrary[,] I have always approved of[,]

16 Alexander Boswell, January 1796, in Buchanan, *Treasure*, p. 195, Alexander Boswell to Sir William Forbes, 17 January 1796, Fettercairn Papers.

if properly devised. My motive to it is not the preservation of my name and memory[]; for I know that after death our places here know us no more[...] but my motives are that the strength of the happy constitu[tion with] which this kingdom is bles[ed] depends in a great measure upo[n] there being kept up a proper number of gentlemens['] familys of independent fortunes.

The method in which the library might have been intended as a guarantor of continuity in the family is expressed in this line from the entail: "it prevents Estat[es] crumbling down by division [into] morsels[:]; it enables the several successive heirs to educate th[eir] whole Children properly & there [by] fit them for different employm[ent] so that these familys are usef[ul] nurseries".<sup>17</sup>

Lord Auchinleck did make clear, however, that the library was meant to descend to the next Boswell of Auchinleck, his prodigal son JB. The "Disposition & Assignment to the Trustees appointed to protect the Dowager Lady Auchinleck's life-rents in the house in Edinburgh and certain lands of the Auchinleck Estate" noted that their rights to liquidate the assets of Auchinleck's movable property after his and his widow's death for the benefit of the heir specifically "except[ed] his household furniture in the house of Auchenleck his Silver plate & Lib[r]ary of books yrby disposed to sd Jas Boswell now of Auchenleck Esqr".<sup>18</sup>

The idea of the Auchinleck House and its library as a place of peace and tranquillity – whose books could transcend time and space – was quite prominent in Lord Auchinleck's mind as he completed the mansion in the early 1760s (Figure 4.3). He had it built in a neoclassical style similar to that of the Adam brothers, but it was not designed by them. The Latin quotation chosen by Lord Auchinleck for the front of the building – "Quod petis, hic est, Est Ulubris, animus si te non deficit aequus" – was from Horace's *Epistles*, Book I, Epistle 11 (ll. 29–30), written to Bullatius, who had been on a Grand Tour of West Asia, an area known to Romans (and somewhat suspected by them) for its oriental luxuries. In the verse letter, Horace advised Bullatius, "Whatever you might be seeking in this world, it is right here in Ulubrae, for those who have a calm and

17 Lord Auchinleck, Deed of Entail, 7 August 1776; 'Bond of Liferent & Disposition Lord Auchinleck to Mrs. Elizabeth Boswell his Spouse', drawn up 7 August 1776, registered 7 September 1782.

18 'Disposition & Assignment to the Trustees of the deceast Alexr Boswell To James Boswell 3 Feby 1785' (from 'Disposition and Translation by Lord Auchenleck', 21 February 1782, registered 3 February 1785); c.f. 'Bond of Liferent & Disposition Lord Auchinleck to Mrs. Elizabeth Boswell his Spouse', drawn up 8 August 1776, registered 7 September 1782.



FIGURE 4.3 *Thomas Annan, photograph of Auchinleck House, perhaps taken ca. 1885 as part of photography for A.H. Millar, The Castles and Mansions of Ayrshire, 1885.*

tempered mind". In a more vulgar Hollywood version, we know these sentiments from the film 'The Wizard of Oz', in the form of Dorothy's concluding remarks, "if I ever go looking for my heart's desire again, I won't look any further than my own backyard; because if it isn't there, I never really lost it to begin with". That is not, precisely speaking, a commitment to making an intellectual desert bloom. It is, however, an ideation of the library's place among the sleepy hamlets of Ayrshire.

It is distinctly possible, however, that the son and grandsons of Lord Auchinleck were more obsessed with the idea of encasing Lord Auchinleck's collection in permanent legal restrictions than he himself had been. Lord Auchinleck was, in the extended – as well as the narrow – sense of the word a 'Whig', and, as the preamble to his entail shows, he saw the successions of the estate as chiefly a utilitarian rather than a sentimental concern. In his collecting, he saw books as valuable for erudite use rather than for gentlemanly ostentation. As a collector, he fixed on correct and authoritative editions of respectable authors rather than sighing over fine bindings or seeking typographical rarities for their own sake. He was not concerned with "preservation of [his] name and memory", but he did oppose "Estat[es] crumbling down by division [into]

morsels". He advocated family property, making special arrangements for his widow's life-use of his books in Edinburgh on the condition that she allow JB access to the law-books. The library perhaps fell into his vision of great country houses as "usef[ul] nurseries", which "educat[ed] th[eir] whole Children properly & there[by] fit them for different employm[ent]".<sup>19</sup>

Given Lord Auchinleck's irritability towards his wayward son JB, who was not assiduous in the study of law or classics, and his generally Stoic or Ancient Roman ethos of civic service, we might ask why he did not donate his library to the Advocates' Library or Signet Library in Edinburgh, where they could have benefitted future generations of practitioners of the Scots Law. He even had the option of giving the books *en bloc* to his most reliable and businesslike son, the plausibly successful merchant (Thomas) David Boswell (1748–1826), who worked in London from c.1779, and from 1803 even had his own rural home in Crawley Grange, Buckinghamshire. Giving them to his mentally ill son John (1743–c.1798), who for most of his life was unwillingly under conservatorship, was not an option, despite the fact that John, disturbed though he was, was an avid reader whose meticulous if tedious diary records details of daily life including titles of books which he read.<sup>20</sup>

In contrast to the books of Old James, loved but not fetishized or surrounded by taboo, the books bought by Lord Auchinleck were the subject of a reverence which was not precisely superstitious, but did pay homage to his role as the originator of the collection. JB, despite his generally conflicted relationship with his father, insisted on freezing Lord Auchinleck's collection of classics and rare manuscripts into a marmoreal form in the entail, as if to say: "Si monumentum requiris, circumspice".<sup>21</sup> JB's peculiar and somewhat illogical limitation of the entailed books to the manuscripts and the Greek and Latin classics excluded the substantial number of law-books and modern literature, both sacred and secular, which Old James and Lord Auchinleck (and a smattering of their earlier kin) had collected. Why precisely JB chose to divide the impressive and wide-ranging collection amassed by his grandfather and father into eternal and ephemeral parts, and to set the dividing line at Ancient Greek, Ancient Roman, and Medieval and Renaissance manuscripts, as well as (implicitly) the family charters, has never been sufficiently explained.

19 Lord Auchinleck, Deed of Entail, 7 August 1776; 'Bond of Liferent & Disposition Lord Auchinleck to Mrs. Elizabeth Boswell his Spouse', drawn up 7 August 1776, registered 7 September 1782.

20 Boswell MS C404.1–404.3, Lt. John Boswell, Journal 1764–69; Photostat of Lt. John Boswell, Journal 1769–1770 (original now missing); MS C404.6–8, Memoranda 1766–1767.

21 "If you want to see a monument to him, look around you".

In the end, as far as we can tell from the partially-surviving catalogue drawn up by JB's wife Margaret Montgomery Boswell in the early 1780s, JB left his father's collection almost exactly as he had found it in 1782–83 when he became Laird. He opted, reverently, to add to it, rather than weed and seed it or donate it *en bloc*, as another wayward son, George IV, would donate his father's library to the nation (via the British Library) some decades later in 1823.<sup>22</sup>

Lord Auchinleck's grandson Sandie, when working on smartening up the collection in 1810, chose to preserve evidences of his grandfather's unexceptional handwriting as a legacy of Auchinleck's role in developing the collection. "Although by no means done with that nicety which [Lord Auchinleck's] writing shews that he was capable of and of respect to the *Collector* himself, I have preserved some of his Titling though the Book looks dirty in consequence but all stranger hands I washed out without mercy".<sup>23</sup>

Even as he added books to Auchinleck's shelves, JB came to feel that the country house library was a patrimony to be passed down from generation to generation, a trans-temporal feudal Burkean legacy safeguarded by an entail. Those accustomed to seeing Boswell as the consummate Scot who turned himself into more of a stereotypical Londoner than a native Londoner himself could ever be, might be surprised by this remaining connection to the Ayrshire estate. JB saw the great house not simply as a generator of agricultural rents, but as a cultural ideal. For him, Auchinleck was a symbol of the permanence of the family in the Tory/Feudal world-order which, in the 1790s, came under threat by the forces of the French Revolution and the British Jacobins. Many of his comments made in London revolve around the "steadiness" he felt as a Laird of Auchinleck.<sup>24</sup>

JB's will of 1785, written about three years after his father died, re-imposed on the family the responsibility for preserving its patrimony. He began by protecting the ebony cabinet and plate of silver gilt from "my Honoured and pious Grand Mother Lady Elizabeth [Bruce] Boswell" (1673–1734, Old James's wife). These Continental relics descended from his Dutch ancestor Veronica van Aerssen van Sommelsdyck (d. 1702). He added a new obligation to this, to preserve

22 John Goldfinch, 'Moving the King's Library: Argument and Sentiment 1832–1998', in Giles Mandelbrote and Barry Taylor (eds.), *Libraries Within the Library: The Origins of the British Libraries Printed Collections* (London: British Library, 2009), pp. 280–95.

23 Boswell MS C272.3, Alexander Boswell to James Boswell the Younger, 2 June 1810.

24 See, for example, his statement in his journal on 13 February 1786, "I was quite the *Laird of Auchinleck in the Inner Temple*"; quoted in James J. Caudle, 'James Boswell (H. Scoticus Londoniensis)', in Stana Nenadic (ed.), *Scots in London in the Eighteenth Century* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2010), pp. 109–138, at pp. 109, 122.



in perpetuity the “very Curios Collection of the Classics and other Books which it is desireable should be preserved for Ever in the Family of Auchinleck” made by his “late honoured Father”. This included the “Greek and Latin Books as also all manuscripts of whatever kind lying in the house of Auchinleck”.

JB did not, however, elect to impose any sense of family legacy on his own modern book collection, excepting perhaps the Greek and Latin books. Many legal battles were subsequently fought in the twentieth century over whether “all manuscripts of whatever kind lying in the house of Auchinleck”, as defined by JB in 1785, included his own holograph literary manuscripts such as his journals and the book manuscript of *Hebrides* (1785). Why, one wonders, did he not feel emboldened to commit the family to preserving the books that he collected in the 1760s and 1770s? JB had such a substantial ego that it was the subject of a great deal of gentle and even savage mockery in the London press; why did his narcissistic self-assurance not extend to the marmorealisation of his own collecting?<sup>25</sup> There is no hint in the surviving papers of JB having any confidence that he could be as great a collector as Lord Auchinleck; that degree of bravery or intrepidity in the art of book-collecting was delayed until his sons’ generation. Only his personal picture-collection was locked into the entail. His personal literary manuscripts, “all my Manuscripts of my Own Composition and all my Letters from Various persons”, were to be evaluated by his three executors, “to be published for the benefit Of my younger Children as they shall Decide that is to say they are to have a Discretionary power to publish more or less”.<sup>26</sup> His own carelessness – inexcusable in a man trained in the law – about the entail of the books and manuscripts in the estate would later cause a great deal of unnecessary confusion between Sandie and his siblings about which books at Auchinleck were supposed to go to which heirs, despite his care in establishing the principle of preservation, and his repeated concerns about the continuation of Auchinleck’s treasures.

Dealing with the estate’s creditors from 1795 onwards, Sandie would face dissensions among his siblings over matters such as annuities, occasioned by the division in the will between the core of Auchinleck’s library locked in by entail and the partible inheritance divisible among the younger siblings. JB’s imprecision in the testament led to the siblings contesting Sandie’s claim to have inherited not only the entirety of Auchinleck’s library and manuscripts,

25 Lucyle Werkmeister, ‘Jemmie Boswell and the London Daily Press, 1785–1795’, *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, 67 (1963), pp. 82–114, 169–185; Lyle Larsen (ed.), *James Boswell: As His Contemporaries Saw Him* (Madison [N.J.]: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2008).

26 National Records of Scotland, CC9/7/77, ‘Testament of James Boswell’, 1785.

but also the entirety of his father JB's London library and manuscripts. In the end, in order to preserve Auchinleck, Sandie had to purchase as free property from his aggrieved siblings all of the Auchinleck books, with the exception of Lord Auchinleck's classics, and all of the Auchinleck manuscripts, with the exception of JB's private papers kept under care by executors for the benefit of the younger children. David Buchanan argues that this sum of £130 paid for Auchinleck's library (as part of a £300 total paid for the house's contents excluding the abovementioned exceptions) meant, that as of 1805, Sandie was no longer bound by his father's will with regard to the books he had bought from his siblings.<sup>27</sup> His mediated settlement of their claims freed him to do with those books as he pleased.

Another gap in JB's estate planning was the question of where his London books ought to go, and if those books were covered by the entail. There is an important question of whether permanence and obligation are handled the same way when discussing a town house library rather than a country house library. In general, it seems from extant evidence that a town house's collection was presumed inherently to lack permanence when contrasted to a larger country seat's library, although we do see some cases in which the volumes in a town house library, such as that of the Duke of Argyll, outshone the books of his country seat.<sup>28</sup> JB had established a household in England without making up a separate English will, a strange mistake for a man who was called to the bar in English law in 1786. Boswell's will, registered on 7 August 1795, listed the entirety of "Furniture Books Pictures &c. in the Defunct's house in London" (unfortunately not separated into categories) as being £483 14s.<sup>29</sup> The London town house contents were therefore certainly worth monetising, even without reference to sentimental value. The property had to be sold to cover the estate's debts. Sandie wrote from his German Grand Tour in January 1796 imploring his sister to keep at least some of the books in their deceased father's town house away from sale.<sup>30</sup> Sandie's letter establishes that JB had moved certain ancestral books from their rightful places in Auchinleck's library, but not emended his will to require their safe return home after his death. There does seem to

27 Buchanan, *Treasure*, p. 196 and n. 75, citing E.D. Sandford, *A Treatise on the History and Law of Entails in Scotland*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh, 1842), pp. 251–252.

28 Roger L. Emerson, *An Enlightened Duke: The Life of Archibald Campbell (1692–1761), Earl of Ilay, 3rd Duke of Argyll* (Kilkeran: Humming Earth, 2013).

29 James Boswell's Will; see Charles Rogers, 'Memoir of James Boswell', in Charles Rogers (ed.), *Boswelliana: The Commonplace Book of James Boswell* (London: Printed for the Grampian Club, 1874), pp. 187–188.

30 Buchanan, *Treasure*, p. 195; NLS, Fettercain Papers, Alexander Boswell to Sir William Forbes, 17 January 1796.

have been some sale, or proposed sale, of the estate in the London town house, or at least the paintings.<sup>31</sup>

Further difficulties in the process of preserving private libraries for future generations are evidence in the financial wranglings that followed the deaths of JB's sons, Sandie and Jamie, in close succession in the early 1820s. Things initially had seemed very promising for the partnership of the Boswell brothers, one operating from his town house in London, the other established at the country seat of Auchinleck. Jamie acted as scout and buyer in the London bookshops, helping Sandie enhance the collection at Auchinleck.<sup>32</sup> Jamie's unexpected death in 1822 triggered the dispersal of his townhouse library, since he died unmarried and left a will, or wills (1812–22), leaving to Sandie "all I am possessed of in the World to be disposed of as he shall think proper".<sup>33</sup> The first auction of any Boswell library was the Sotheby's sale of May 1825, in which the books of Jamie's town house were auctioned. The sale took "nine ... Days (Sunday excepted)". The auction contained some of JB's books, but many more books that had once belonged to his father's literary collaborator, Edmond Malone.<sup>34</sup> Terry Seymour has concluded that Jamie must have kept significant or random items from his father's London town-house library. The 1825 Sotheby's auction catalogue was later to cause considerable confusion among those looking to know what books JB had owned, since they ended up

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- 31 Harvard University, Houghton Library, Hyde Collection, Alexander Boswell to Sir William Forbes, 14 September 1795; William Forbes to Edmond Malone, 30 June 1796; Buchanan, *Treasure*, pp. 14–15, citing Alexander Boswell to William Forbes, 21 October 1795.
  - 32 It is a pity that Jamie, who was the most scholarly and 'academic' Boswell since Lord Auchinleck (Westminster School, Brasenose Coll. Oxford B.A., M.A.), did not live to revise and upgrade his elder brother's efforts to record the great collection.
  - 33 TNA, PROB 11/1654/2, 'Will of James Boswell, Barrister at Law of Garden Court Temple, City of London', proved 13 March 1822, Prerogative Court of Canterbury, Merschell Quire Numbers, 101–150; PROB 11/1654/305, 'Will of James Boswell, Barrister at Law of Garden Court Temple, City of London', proved 19 March 1822, Prerogative Court of Canterbury, Merschell Quire Numbers, 101–150. Buchanan, *Treasure*, pp. 19–22, citing Letters of Administration in Favour of William How dated 18 November 1824, embodying a copy of James's will.
  - 34 *Bibliotheca Boswelliana: A Catalogue of the Entire Library of the Late James Boswell, Esq....* (London: J. Compton, 1825); Arthur Sherbo, 'From the Sale Catalogue of the Library of James Boswell the Younger (1778–1882)', *Notes & Queries*, 51 (2004), pp. 60–63; Arthur Sherbo, 'From Bibliotheca Boswelliana, the Sale catalogue of the Library of James Boswell, the Younger', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 97.3 (2003); Jost, 'Establishing the Provenance'.

studying books which were either duplicates from Edmond Malone's collection, or Jamie's collection.<sup>35</sup>

Sandie, by this point a baronet, died, aged forty-six on 27 March 1822, a little over a month after Jamie's death, from injuries sustained in an entirely avoidable duel. Sandie's understanding of his role as a transmitter of cultural capital from past generations had been laid out carefully in a letter to Jamie in April 1810. "I mentioned in my last [letter]", he remarked, "my formal introduction to the Library which has proved the source of much satisfaction and allowable pride for I have thus been enabled to appreciate more fully the collection which my father Entailed (eheu fugaces! [Lat. "Oh how the years fly!"]) & which my Grandfather had collected when very young with an ardour not common at that period".<sup>36</sup> Note that in this description he draws on JB's concept of the collection as Lord Auchinleck's 'collection', and JB's 'entail'. Not unexpectedly given his sudden death, Sandie's financial affairs were found to be in great disarray. He had spent freely on land acquisition, on buying his way into Parliament, on his book collecting and his private printing press, the latter two probably being the least damaging to his solvency. He passed on to his son and heir £40,000 in bond debts, £32,000 in personal debts, and only £10,000 in assets.<sup>37</sup>

The estate was in such bad shape that until it could be restored to solvency, Sandie's heir Sir James (1807–57) was advised not to accept the full inheritance, but to leave "the management disposal and application" of movable property "to some other person or persons as Executors". Sandie's widow, the Dowager Lady Boswell (Grisel Cuming), bought the library's books and the house's furniture on her son's behalf, thus insulating them from seizure until further arrangements could be made for the compounding of Sandie's debts.<sup>38</sup> They could, of course, have been monetised to protect other assets, especially since Sir James had not shown any particular interest in books by his teens, and indeed never would become much of a bibliophile. So Grisel's actions are construable as having been grounded in admiration for her late husband Sandie's book collection, and the legacy of Sandie's grandfather. In the end, Sir James's talents lay in matters equestrian, and although Terry Seymour did

35 For instance, the easily misleading title of Donald Eddy (ed.), *Sale Catalogues of the Libraries of Samuel Johnson, Hester Lynch Thrale (Mrs. Piozzi) and James Boswell* (New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press, 1993).

36 Boswell MS C272.2, Alexander Boswell to James Boswell the Younger, 4 April 1810; Horace, Ode 14, 'Eheu fugaces, Postume'.

37 D.R. Fisher, 'Boswell, Sir Alexander, first baronet (1775–1822)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

38 Frederick A. Pottle, 'Notes on the Importance of Private Legal Documents', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 106.4 (22 August 1962), pp. 327–334.

“revise slightly” Frederick Pottle’s uncharitable conclusion that Sir James never “added a single important book to the library”, it does seem that his major additions were “a significant number of racing and sporting books”. Seymour has concluded that “[t]he owners after Sandy seem to have treated the library as a sort of off-limits museum. We have no records of outside visitors or other family members making any use of it or adding to the holdings”.<sup>39</sup>

Auchinleck’s books passed on through a line of female heirs including Sir James’s widow and his eldest daughter in 1857–1905, and were held in ‘liferent’ from 1884–1905 by that eldest daughter, who chiefly lived in Carlisle with her husband (Figure 4.4). The Auchinleck library’s collection was eventually to be dispersed by auctions in June 1893, March 1916, May 1917, and May 1976.<sup>40</sup> The latter three auctions were under the aegis of the Talbots, an Irish family with their country seat at Malahide Castle near Dublin, whose heirs inherited via

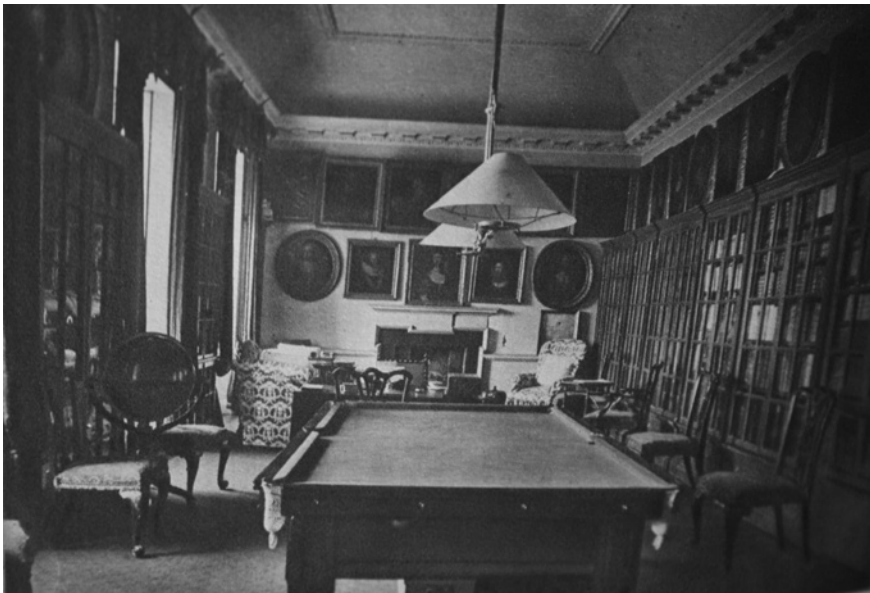


FIGURE 4.4 Anonymous, undated photograph of the library at Auchinleck House, ca. 1892–1917.

PUBLISHED IN THOMAS HANNAN, *FAMOUS SCOTTISH HOUSES: THE LOWLANDS*, LONDON: A. & C. BLACK, 1928, FACING P. 3.

39 Seymour, *Boswell's Books*, pp. 40, 60–61; Buchanan, *Treasure*.

40 Seymour, *Boswell's Books*, pp. 61–71; Mary Hyde, ‘Boswell’s Ebony Cabinet’, in R.F. Brisenden and J.C. Eade (eds.), *Studies in the Eighteenth Century III: Papers Presented at the Third David Nichol Smith Memorial Seminar, Canberra 1973* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976); Joseph Reed, ‘James Boswell’s Ebony Cabinet at Yale’, *The Yale University Library Gazette*, 82.1/2 (October 2007), pp. 31–37.

the line of Sir James's younger daughter, whom the fifth Lord Talbot de Malahide had married in 1873.<sup>41</sup> The Talbots of Malahide were, in the 1920s, to become inadvertently famous when their quiet country house was found to be the repository of many (though not all) of the surviving manuscripts of James Boswell and other members of the Boswell family, as well as a few of the rare books not already dispersed by the auctions.<sup>42</sup> Discussions of the dismemberment of the collection and many others like it in 1892–1976 belong rather to accounts of the decline of the British and Irish country house and the crisis of the aristocracy and greater gentry during the long twentieth century.

### Community in Kinship, County and the Republic of Letters

To what extent was a country house library inherently or necessarily a part of the community rather than a 'silo' or a treasure-house? At least for Auchinleck House, there is no evidence of external expectation or anticipation of community connection; it either happened or did not according to the temperament and whim of the laird. An expansive or ebullient laird, or one with a sense of the Republic of Letters (as Lord Auchinleck had in the mid-Georgian era) or 'feudal' *noblesse oblige* (as Sandie had in the Regency), might invite guests in, or even lend his rarest books and manuscripts. By contrast, a depressed or introverted laird (like Old James or JB at the end of their lives) might retreat into the library, using it as a way of escaping the community, as a sanctuary away from the public rooms of the house which were more firmly attached to hospitality. In that respect, personal and private collections were mostly unlike the libraries of universities, guilds, for-profit commercial vendors and non-profit subscription institutions. As Gibbon observed in the quotation which began this chapter, nothing was owed by a country house library's master to the public, at least on paper. The county community had to depend on the *noblesse oblige* of the house's current owner for access to the books. The ability to peruse the shelves, consult books in the library and, in certain cases of trust, borrow them, was a withdrawable privilege rather than a natural or civil right.

While the Boswells increasingly came to regard Auchinleck's library – if not their more temporary town-house collections – as a permanent investment in the family's future prosperity, we also occasionally glimpse in their papers a sense of the private library as a community resource. In the first place, of course, each of the generations of Boswell men discussed in this chapter had

41 Seymour, *Boswell's Books*, p. 37.

42 Buchanan, *Treasure*; Pottle, *Pride and Negligence*.

large families, and the kinship network comprised of these families constituted the immediate library community that must have used the libraries most frequently – whether at Auchinleck, or in their various townhouses. We know, for instance, that Lady Elizabeth (Bruce) Boswell (b.1673), Old James's wife and Lord Auchinleck's mother, "read a good deal Books of Divinity of which She had a good collection English ffrench & Dutch", which were kept in the family library after her death.<sup>43</sup> Lord Auchinleck's first wife, Euphemia (Erskine) Boswell (d. ?1766), was also a reader, although of a much more typical sort, focusing on religious books in English. She "read a great deal of Books of piety particularly Mr Harveys works Bishop L[e]ighton, Reformed Devotions & y<sup>e</sup> like".<sup>44</sup>

There could be tensions within this immediate library community. In one case, a difference of opinion between family members necessitated a legal barrier to protect a stepmother's inheritance as a widow. The second Lady Auchinleck faced opposition from her resentful stepson, JB, who felt she was a designing woman, and not authentically part of the family legacy, although she was both a wife and a kinswoman before her marriage.<sup>45</sup> The Dowager Lady Auchinleck held use-rights in parts of the collection after her husband's death. She inherited from her husband a guaranteed life rent in the house in St Andrew's Square in the New Town, a bequest which brought with it stewardship of his Edinburgh book collection, though JB was meant to have access and withdrawal rights for his late father's books on Scottish law.<sup>46</sup> In a letter from Claude Boswell of Balmuto to Sir William Forbes soon after JB's death, the truce line between stepmother and stepson regarding Lord Auchinleck's books remaining in Edinburgh 1782–95 was recalled, as well as the transfer of the paternal books across it. Balmuto told Sir William that,

the late Lord A. to prevent all interference betwixt his Widow & Son left the furniture and every thing within the house in Edinr: to his Widow[.] There was a few Law Books in the house at the time of Lord As: death Mr. B. having taken away a considerable number of them during his Fathers Lifetime[.] These with some other Books in the Presses

43 Boswell MS C338.8, Lord Auchinleck, his segment of the Unfinished History of the Boswells of Auchinleck, p. 29.

44 Ibid., p. 48.

45 Lord Auchinleck's second wife was his cousin Elizabeth Boswell (m. 1769, d. 1799) of the Boswells of Balmuto.

46 *Gentleman's Magazine*, lxix (1799), 718; *Williamson's Directory* (1784–1796); *Caledonian Mercury*, 31 August 1799; *Edinburgh Advertiser*, 3 September 1799.

in the Library Lady A. repeatedly desired Mr. B. to take. – Mr. B. believes that there are some Books in the Custody of Mr. Donaldson[;] at least he recollects of Mr. B. saying so the last time he was in.<sup>47</sup>

Perhaps unknown to Balmuto was the conciliatory letter which JB had written to the Dowager Lady Auchinleck in June 1791 regarding this treaty of partition within the family's community library. His letter was prompted by a search in "the repositories at Auchinleck" for manuscripts: "a large and valuable collection of letters of my Great Grandfather, Grandfather, Lady Betty Boswell, Sir David Hamilton &c which in my mind were more precious than gold". In it, he had made the following assertion in a spirit of reconciliation: "soon after my honoured Fathers death [in 1782] I laid all his deeds of Settlement before Mr. Ilay Campbell now Lord President of the Court of Session ... according to his opinion all my Fathers Books wherever found are mine under the description of his *Library*". He then offered his stepmother all of Lord Auchinleck's books still remaining in the Edinburgh town house: "To any of them that are in the house in Edinburgh you are heartily welcome and you will truly oblige me by accepting all of them that are fit for a Lady reading". The concession was peculiar, and perhaps moot, since the life-rent could equally well be construed as having given her (as Balmuto noted) the contents of the house, though Lord President clearly thought differently. He concluded with a request for her aid: "I beg that I may have all his Manuscripts and letters, except those from yourself they being according to the same opinion clearly mine as his heir". His description of the ancestral letters showed how he regarded the family library as an archive, as much as a collection of printed books and manuscripts by those not part of the kinship network: "Memorials of worthy and pious ancestors are sacred relicks in families and should be preserved with great care", he concluded.<sup>48</sup>

No evidence has yet been traced to confirm whether during JB's time the libraries had wider currency among other members of the community, with books borrowed by friends or neighbours as a social or cultural resource. Other family libraries of the period which have been studied in detail certainly lent books out to the wider population, occasionally quite far down the social scale, but for JB Auchinleck's library seems to have constituted more of a retreat from Ayrshire's county society. Here he could escape from endless rounds of visits to be paid to neighbours and to one's rural estate, and from the quasi-obligatory

47 NLS, Fettercain Papers, Box 88, Claude Boswell of Balmuto to Sir William Forbes, 9 July 1795.

48 Boswell MS L126, James Boswell to Elizabeth Boswell, Lady Auchinleck, 4 June 1791.



convivial drinking, with its seemingly unending toasts and healths and bumpers, which characterised rural Scottish country-house dinners.<sup>49</sup>

If JB's visits to the main family library at Auchinleck looked inwards to reading in secluded peace, the actions of his grandfather and father looked outward during their time. Some of the books that Old James brought back from the Grand Tour were intended as tokens of community neighbourliness, such as the works he bought in the Netherlands for William Alexander and for "Ochiltree".<sup>50</sup> Lord Auchinleck collected works on the basis of their value to his own learning and that of others. For him, manuscripts were to be collected as a service to the world of learning. In 1740, he acquired a splendid mid-fourteenth-century anthology of a wide array of sacred and secular literature in "Inglisch". Four years later he donated that book to the Advocates' Library in Edinburgh in 1744, and it is still known to Medievalists as the celebrated "Auchinleck Manuscript". Lord Auchinleck certainly succeeded in being remembered in Ayrshire as a great book collector and lover of learning, memorialised as such by James Paterson (1805–76), the county's first major historian: "Lord Auchinleck was a man of profound judgment, with a considerable taste for the olden literature of the country. The number of rare and valuable works which he is understood to have been chiefly instrumental in gathering together, has conferred on Auchinleck's library a fame that few other private collections have acquired".<sup>51</sup> Since Paterson was only seventeen or so when Sandie and Jamie died, his sense of the library's "fame" and the regard for the "rare and valuable works" was probably gained through oral sources of county tradition which he heard after he arrived in the region in 1839 to edit the *Ayr Observer*.

Interest in the documentation and preservation of their ancestors' library building activities amongst subsequent generations of Boswells fits readily with the cultural ambitions of the Scottish intellectual community at this time,

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49 JB protested from Auchinleck to Jamie in October 1794, "The expence of living here is much greater to me than London ... there must here be every day a dinner sufficient for a company, as we cannot be sure of being alone. I do not think I have had two comfortable days putting together all the hours which should be reckoned so, since the 1st of July when I arrived here. Entertaining company is a weary labour to me; and when I pay visits I seem to myself to be fighting battles". Boswell MS L148, James Boswell to James Boswell the younger, 27 October 1794; Boswell MS L150, James Boswell to James Boswell, the Younger, 6 November 1794.

50 Boswell MS C338, Old James Boswell to David Boswell his father, 1 November 1695 (transcribed copies); 12 June, deleted repeat entry 15 June.

51 James Paterson, *History of the County of Ayr, with a Genealogical Account of the Families of Ayrshire* (Ayr: John Dick, T.G. Stevenson, 1847), i. 239.

which prioritised the recovery of material traces of the nation's past. Sandie aspired from around 1810 to be among the ranks of "those who have employed their leisure in works of this [community antiquarian] kind". It is plausible that his getting to grips with the country house library, and re-organising and cataloguing it, helped the idle Regency buck of 1796 to mature into the patron of Scottish *belles lettres* and heritage of 1820.<sup>52</sup> Whereas Lord Auchinleck had sought to give his library's treasures to the wider public through donations, Sandie viewed publication as a way of integrating the library with contemporary efforts to rethink the intersections of historically-rooted Scottish, British and Anglo-British national identities.<sup>53</sup> In the introduction to *The Spirit of Tintoc* (1803), Sandie praised the antiquarian editors of his time, "men skilled in the lore" of the Dark Ages, Middle Ages and Renaissance, who "employed their leisure" in "deep researches". They spent years trying to "rake together the scattered scraps of information, which are yearly mouldering away", "sifted the dust of the North" and "separated the golden treasures".<sup>54</sup>

As Sandie aged, his interest shifted towards collecting rarities from the early decades of British printing, and he actively pursued the patriotic reprinting of the more significant titles he acquired. In November 1815, he informed his brother, "I have got hold of some tracts by Churchyard [dated 1594 and 1596] ... With these I begin my reprints at Auchinleck".<sup>55</sup> He set up a printing-office for himself near Auchinleck House, the "Officina Typographica Straminea" in the 1810s, and soon became "infected with the type fever". He bought a Ruthven "portable press" in 1815 and "commenced compositor", eventually upgrading to "one of Mr. Ruthven's full-sized ones".<sup>56</sup> In January 1816 he wrote to his brother

52 *The Spirit of Tintoc: A Ballad: With Notes* (Edinburgh: Printed for Manners and Miller by Mundell and Son, 1803), pp. 3–7; reprinted in Robert Howie Smith, *The Poetical Works of Sir Alexander Boswell of Auchinleck, Now First Collected and Edited* (Glasgow: Maurice Ogle & company, 1871), p. 111.

53 Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837*, 3rd ed. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009); Colin Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past: Scottish Whig Historians and the Creation of an Anglo-British Identity, 1689–c.1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Colin Kidd, *British Identities before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

54 *Spirit of Tintoc*, pp. 3–7; reprinted in Smith, *The Poetical Works of Sir Alexander Boswell*, p. 111.

55 Boswell MS C274.2, Alexander Boswell to James Boswell the Younger, 12 November 1815. *A Sad and Solemne Funerall, of the Right Honorable Sir Francis Knowles* (London: By Ar. Hatfield, for William Holme, 1596), no. 4 in *Frondes Caducae*, Reprinted at the Auchinleck Press, by Alexander Boswell, 1817.

56 'The Auchinleck Press', in John Martin, *Bibliographical Catalogue of Books Privately Printed: Including those of the Bannatyne, Maitland and Roxburgh Clubs and of the Private*

about his ambitious re-printings of rarities, and how he anticipated they would connect him to the world of “Arch-Bibliomaniacs”:

I have it in contemplation to present a copy to each of the Arch-Bibliomaniacs of the Roxburgh reckoning that thus I may look for a copy of their Reprints. If this is not likely to succeed I wont be so *liberal*. I intend also to present a copy to the Advocates Library the Edinburgh College Library and the British Museum.<sup>57</sup>

Significantly in this context, he also allowed other members of the antiquarian community to use documents in Auchinleck’s library. The modernising national archivist and antiquarian Thomas Thomson (1768–1852) obtained “many private records and documents in his possession” lent to him “by various noblemen and gentlemen from their charter chests”. Sandie was one of those gentlemen who lent generously, although the loan of the Asloan manuscript to Thomson proved problematic, since its owner died in a duel before it was returned, decades later.<sup>58</sup> The odyssey of the Asloan Manuscript is not simply a sideshow. It informs us about the potential role of the country house library in serving as a repository for rare books and manuscripts which scholars could ask to consult, although there was never any guarantee that access would be granted. Sandie’s benevolence in opening up his collections to outside researchers for the first time, as far as we know, indicates a change in the goals of Auchinleck’s library (or libraries) during the four generations surveyed in this study.

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*Presses at Darlington, Auchinleck, Lee Priory, Newcastle, Middle Hill, and Strawberry Hill* (London: J. and A. Arch; Payne and Foss; J. Rodwell, 1834), pp. 347–358. Alexander Boswell to Thomas Frognall Dibdin, 5 May 1817. The letter was printed in T.F. Dibdin, *The Bibliographical Decameron, or, Ten Days Pleasant Discourse Upon Illuminated Manuscripts, and Subjects Connected with Early Engraving, Typography, and Bibliography* (London: Printed for the author, by W. Bulmer and Co., 1817), iii.453–455; and then reprinted in John Martin, *Bibliographical Catalogue* (1834 ed.), pp. 348–349; Boswell MS C274.4, Alexander Boswell to James Boswell the Younger, 21 January 1816.

57 Boswell MS, C274.4, Alexander Boswell to James Boswell the Younger, 21 January 1816. The publications from his private press at Auchinleck c.1815 were recorded by John Martin, the great bibliographer of the early private presses. Martin, *A Bibliographical Catalogue*.

58 Laing, *Inquiries*, pp. 19–21. T.G.S. (ed.), *The Auchinleck Chronicle* (1877), pp. ix–xiii; Advertisement for Sale of Library of James Allan Maconochie by Peter Scott Fraser, 97 George St., Edinburgh, 6 June 1845+4 lawful days; ‘Minutes of the Evidence Adduced to the House of Lords in the Claim of Sir Frederic John William Johnstone, Bart., to the Earldom of Annandale’, 21 July 1876.

## Conclusion

This chapter has been a first attempt to link the substantial Boswell evidence and the impressive secondary scholarly studies of it to a broader thesis about how private libraries in country and town worked in the eighteenth century. Unless one wishes to dismiss such large collections of books as merely expensive forms of wallpaper or tapestry, or hollow totems of sophistication meant to impress the neighbours, one arrives at the conclusion that private libraries such as Auchinleck often had an *ethos*, an ideology, as much as public libraries did.

This raises questions about the essential tension between the dynastic obligation of protecting the family estate in books and the sense of duty felt towards a broader community, and even to the nation. This included forms that might be less familiar to contemporary readers, such as offering access to rare books for specialised scholars and encouraging publication from the collection. In addition, since certain Boswells also owned books in their more provisional and fungible town house libraries in Edinburgh 1695–1799, and latterly in London from 1786–1822, the Boswell materials raise questions, which cannot yet be answered in full, about the ways in which family members thought of town house libraries as connected to, or disconnected from, the legacy of the central family library at Auchinleck. That complex theme merits its own essay, since the circulatory system between country-house and town-house libraries, the ways in which books flow to and from country house libraries, is an under-explored topic.

As members of the greater gentry, lay patrons of the established Church of Scotland and members of the Edinburgh legal elite for several generations from the reigns of William III to George III, the Boswells of Auchinleck were public and civic characters. Therefore, their private libraries were not built in a vacuum, but were collected and dispersed within broader cultural frameworks of community, collegiality and largesse. Their surviving reflections on the compact of the country house (and town house) library with posterity provides valuable evidence for reconstructing what a private library owner living between 1695 and 1825 felt that he owed his ancestors, his descendants and the broader public in county, metropolis and nation.

## Sedition, Revolution and Libertinism in Eighteenth-Century Brazil: The Library of Naturalist José Vieira Couto

Júnia Ferreira Furtado \*

This chapter seeks to analyse the library of the Brazilian naturalist José Vieira Couto (1752–1827).<sup>1</sup> The aim is to show through the books he owned, and those that he read but did not possess, that there emerged in Brazil an intrinsic relationship between the spread of the Enlightenment and the emergence of subversive political, atheistic and libertine ideas. Many of these ideas were carried by books that crossed the Atlantic world, acquired by Vieira Couto first while a student at Coimbra University and then – ironically – on a tour of European mining operations sponsored by Queen dona Maria I.<sup>2</sup> Once he had settled back in Brazil, Vieira Couto belonged to an important group of well-educated men who were born or living in Minas Gerais and who held many ideas in common. I use the concept of a ‘society of thought’ to describe this group,<sup>3</sup> by which I mean that they shared the same ideas and world views; exchanged books; and discussed political, religious and economic ideas. During the Enlightenment, such societies of thought brought together educated men to discuss scientific, aesthetic, political and religious views in private locations, salons, academies or cafés. I have previously labelled this particular society the ‘Republic of Mazombos’, because its members identified themselves with the

\* This article is part of a larger project, entitled ‘Dos Emboabas Ilustrados à República de Mazombos: Identidade e Alteridade na América Portuguesa (1700–1822)’. My thanks to CNPq, Fapemig and Faperj for their support.

- 1 For a first attempt to analyse the library, see Júnia Ferreira Furtado, ‘Sedição, Heresia e Rebelião nos Trópicos: A Biblioteca do Naturalista José Vieira Couto’, in Eliana Freitas Dutra and Jean-Yves Mollier (eds.) *Política, Nação e Edição: O Lugar dos Impressos na Construção da Vida Política, Brasil, Europa e Américas nos Séculos XVIII–XX* (São Paulo: Editora Annablume, 2006), pp. 69–86; and Júnia Ferreira Furtado, ‘Seditious Books and Libertinism in the Captaincy of Minas Gerais (18th-Century Brazil): The Library of Naturalist José Vieira Couto’, *Revista Complutense de História da América*, 40 (December 2014), pp. 113–136.
- 2 Júnia F. Furtado, ‘Enlightenment Science and Iconoclasm: the Brazilian Naturalist José Vieira Couto’, *Osiris*, 25 (2010), pp. 189–212.
- 3 Augustin Cochin, *Les Sociétés de Pensée et la Démocratie* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1921).

political programme of the Marquis of Pombal, minister to José I (1750–77), who placed great value on Brazilian-born citizens' capacity to administer the empire. They displayed libertine and Masonic inclinations, and enjoyed an intellectual camaraderie dating back to their time as students in Europe. In the political sphere, most importantly, they came to support a republican regime modelled on that of the North American colonies, and believed that the Portuguese American colonies had taken on greater importance in the balance of imperial power. In their view, learned men born in the colony were essential to the formulation of its policies – and ought, therefore, to be rewarded.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter shows how Vieira Couto's library building activities were shaped by his experiences in Europe, before examining his ambiguous relationship with absolute monarchy both as a trusted servant of the crown and as a potential revolutionary. While the majority of books in Vieira Couto's library related to medicine, natural history and mineralogy – those fields that reflected his professional interests and activities – the library also allowed access to radical new ideas associated with the European Enlightenment. The chapter concludes by examining two books that Vieira Couto read but did not possess. These works, one by Abbé Raynal, reveal that political nonconformity and sedition were the basis of common ideas that Vieira Couto shared with his society of thought, ideas that ultimately attracted the unwelcome attention of the Inquisition. Books read and discussed in common thereby provided the wellspring of ideas that served as the foundation for the identity the members of this society forged together.

### Libraries and the Book Trade in Eighteenth-Century Brazil

Large libraries were relatively uncommon in colonial Brazil until the beginning of the eighteenth century, when several factors combined to form a large, educated elite who commonly possessed books. With the discovery of rich deposits of gold and diamonds, substantial urban settlements emerged to exploit these natural resources, underpinned by a growing middle class,<sup>5</sup> and a large

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4 Furtado, 'Seditious Books and Libertinism', p. 115.

5 The mining economy was based on a large network of urban settlements, and was quite different in character from the coast area, where development was based on the sugar cane plantation. While the few plantation owners on the coast had around 100 to 200 slaves in each sugar plantation, wealth was much more evenly distributed in Minas Gerais and there was a wider middle class comprising miners, merchants and small farmers with an average of 5 slaves each.

bureaucracy comprised of educated men of Portuguese and Brazilian extraction. Many emigrated from the north of Portugal to work as bookkeepers for the large number of merchants looking to exploit the region's wealth and natural resources,<sup>6</sup> while priests, doctors and other members of the learned professions were needed to service the increasing population.<sup>7</sup> In turn, increasing numbers of elite boys from the captaincy were sent as students to Coimbra University, returning home from Portugal with a thirst for knowledge and trunks packed full of books.

Many personal book collections were brought to Minas Gerais by their owners, but there was also a vibrant local book market, as shown by Lisbon customs lists that survive in the Portuguese archives.<sup>8</sup> In Vila Rica, the capital of the captaincy, Manuel Ribeiro dos Santos imported books from Lisbon bookseller Jerônimo Roiz Airão to sell in the captaincy.<sup>9</sup> In Tejuco, João Batista Ferreira de Carvalho had thirty volumes of the Bible when he died, probably to sell in the village. Carvalho's stock was broadly typical of the sort of books exported to colonial Brazil throughout this period. As Robert Darnton points out, the Inquisition banned "all books injurious to religion, the state, or customs",<sup>10</sup> and lists of exported books had to be passed by censors before the cargo could be released from port.<sup>11</sup> Thus in theory only legal books could enter the colonies,

6 Margarida Durães, 'Estratégias de Sobrevivência Econômica nas Famílias Camponesas Minhotas: Os Padrões Hereditários (Sécs XVIII–XIX)', in *Anais do XIV Encontro Nacional de Estudos Populacionais/ABEP*. Caxambu-MG, 20–24 September 2004.

7 Luís Carlos Villalta, *Reformismo Ilustrado, Censura e Práticas de Leitura: Usos do Livro na América Portuguesa* (São Paulo: FFLCH-USP, 1999).

8 Very few books were printed in Brazil, due to long-standing prohibitions on the installation of printing presses there, which were actually strengthened in 1785. This changed finally with the arrival of the Portuguese court in 1808; a Royal Press was hastily installed on 13 May 1808, followed by several private ones, such as the press owned in Bahia by Manoel Antonio da Silva.

9 Sílvia Gabriel Diniz, 'Um Livreiro em Vila Rica no Meado do Século XVIII', *Kriterion*, 47/48 (1959), pp. 180–198.

10 Robert Darnton, *L'univers de la Littérature Clandestine au XVIII<sup>e</sup> Siecle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), p. 14.

11 The mechanism of censorship varied during our period. Originally it had been the responsibility of three institutions, both religious and civilian (the Inquisition, the Desembargo do Paço and the Ordinário/Episcopal authority), but the system was unified in 1768 by dom José I under the control of the State that created the Real Mesa Censória. In 1787, dona Maria I abolished the Real Mesa Censória and created the *Real Comissão Geral sobre o Exame e Censura de Livros*, which survived until 1794 when the pre-1768 tripartite system was reimposed. Between 1811 and 1821 a Censorship Committee functioned in the captaincy of Bahia, during the stay of the Court in Brazil.

but the ban was never fully respected: first because several educated men – as priests and authorities – could import and read forbidden books under license, and secondly because many forbidden books crossed the Atlantic as personal belongings, often with the intention that they would be sold off illicitly once their owners made landfall. For example, on 19 July 1799, in a ship docked in the port of Rio de Janeiro, “books and catechisms of Free masons” were found among the belongings of Franciso Álvaro da Silva Freire.<sup>12</sup> José Vieira Couto himself sold books sent to him from Lisbon for that purpose by Tejucoan friend Simão Pires Sardinha, with whom he had established a joint venture to import a steady stream of newly published works into Brazil.<sup>13</sup> These included the 1795–96 memoirs published by the Academia Real de Ciências de Lisboa (Royal Academy of Science of Lisbon), *Anais das Ciências, das Artes e Letras: Sciencias mathematicas, physicas, historico-naturaes e medicas*, of which Vieira Couto kept four volumes for himself.<sup>14</sup> The same was true of Vieira Couto’s friend and colleague Francisco de Paula Vieira, who possessed at the time of his death forty-six volumes of Buffon’s *Natural History*, fifteen volumes of Plutarch’s *Lives of Illustrious Men* and fifteen volumes of the *History of Portugal* by Laclède, all intended for resale, quite apart from the books that formed his own library.<sup>15</sup>

These arrangements meant that Minas Gerais in general, and Tejuco in particular, boasted a significant number of private libraries.<sup>16</sup> The largest libraries uncovered so far belonged to two of Vieira Couto’s acquaintances: the lawyer Claudio Manuel da Costa possessed 300 titles and the friar Luís Vieira da Silva owed 278 titles,<sup>17</sup> Together with Vieira Couto, they helped plan a rebellion against the Portuguese crown in 1789 (discussed in more detail below). But book ownership was both wide and quite socially diffuse: in Vila Rica the tax collector Manuel Teixeira de Quiroga had forty-four titles in 176 volumes,

12 Rio de Janeiro. Arquivo Nacional (AN). Negócios de Portugal (NP). Fundo 59. Códice 68, v. 15, fs. 184–184v, 185–185v, 280.

13 ANTT. IL. Maço 1076. Processo 12.957.

14 ANTT. Real Mesa Censória. Caixa 161, f. 1–4. This is the only shipment discovered to date.

15 BAT. 1º. ofício, maço 22. This was a practice that spread throughout colonial South America; for example, “in Nueva Granada, a number of lettered men also became booksellers, importing them not only for themselves but also with an eye to selling them, thus alleviating the effects of the restricted local book market”; Furtado, ‘Seditious Books and Libertinism’, pp. 120–121.

16 On Tejuco’s libraries, see Paulo Gomes Leite, ‘A Cultura do Tejuco no Resgate do Iluminismo em Minas Gerais’, *Revista Minas Gerais*, 14 (March 1989), pp. 22–26; Paulo Gomes Leite, ‘Livros Perigosos no Tejuco’, *Revista Minas Gerais*, 22 (December 1989), pp. 28–32; Paulo Gomes Leite, ‘Pornografia, Subversão e Ateísmo na Biblioteca de um Cientista Tejucoano’, *Revista do Instituto Histórico e Geográfico de Minas Gerais*, 23 (April 2000), pp. 222–233.

17 Eduardo Frieiro, *O Diabo na Livraria do Cônego* (São Paulo: Edusp, 1981).



while the judge Tomás Antonio Gonzaga had ninety-three titles; in São João del Rei, the vicar Carlos Correa de Toledo had sixty, Father Manoel Rodrigues da Costa owned fifty-eight, and captain José Resende Costa only twenty; in Mariana, the seat of the bishopric,<sup>18</sup> the lawyer José Pereira Ribeiro had 204 titles in 452 volumes.<sup>19</sup> Besides Vieira Couto himself, there is evidence for a further twenty-one libraries in Tejuco between 1794 and 1822 in the inventory lists.<sup>20</sup> The mulata Rita Quitéria de São José had thirty-two titles, the colonel José Velho Barreto owed 156 titles, and the administrator supervisor José da Silva de Oliveira had twenty-nine, while priests Manoel Caetano Ferreira, João de Freitas Sampaio and Luiz Manoel da Costa Souza had thirty-five, ninety and seventy-two books respectively.<sup>21</sup>

As these figures suggest, the market for imported books was particularly vibrant in Vieira Couto's home village of Tejuco, located in the diamond district in the northeastern part of the captaincy of Minas Gerais. By the standards of the day, Tejuco was no small settlement. In the third quarter of the eighteenth century there were some 510 houses in the village, home to a total of 884 free residents.<sup>22</sup> By the beginning of the nineteenth century, when French botanist and traveller Auguste de Saint-Hilaire (1779–1853) visited the region, Tejuco already had a population of 6,000 and some 800 houses. The traveller not only marvelled at the environment of luxury and abundance that reigned in the village, but also at the puissance of the local commerce whose shops were replete with imported goods, such as English and Indian crockery, all of which had been brought there on donkey-back.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, Saint-Hilaire was deeply impressed by the local cultural scene, finding “in this locale more instruction than in the rest of Brazil, more taste for literature, and a livelier desire to instruct oneself”.<sup>24</sup> He emphasised the locals' talent in calligraphy, grammar and music, and was able

18 Sílvia Gabriel Diniz, 'A Biblioteca de um Contratador de Dízimos', *Revista de História e Arte*, 33 (1959), pp. 64–66.

19 Álvaro de Araujo Antunes, *Espelho de Cem Faces: O Universo Relacional de um Advogado Setecentista* (São Paulo: Anna Blume, 2004).

20 Diamantina. Biblioteca Antônio Torres (BAT). Inventários. Cartórios do 1st. e 2nd Ofícios.

21 Junia Ferreira Furtado, *O livro da Capa Verde: A Vida no Distrito Diamantino no Período Real Extração* (Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade de Coimbra, 2012), pp. 53–54.

22 AHU. MAMG. Caixa 108, doc. 9, fls. 1–9.

23 Two of the three remaining books from Vieira Couto's library that I have located in Diamantina (previously Tejuco) in the library of the Bishopric have inscriptions that indicate ownership (and possible purchase) in Tejuco. In the front page of his *Galerie Militaire de Bonaparte* he wrote “Tejuco, 14 July 1808”, and in the “Système des Connaissances Chimiques”, by Fourcroy, he wrote “Tejuco, 15 July, 1804”.

24 Auguste Saint-Hilaire, *Viagem pelo Distrito dos Diamantes e litoral do Brasil* (Belo Horizonte: Itatiaia, 1974), p. 33.

to immerse himself readily in a cultured, refined elite, well versed in French. Although remote, Tejuco was open to the kaleidoscopic book and material culture of the wider Atlantic world and the intellectual life that came to flourish there mirrored developments elsewhere, as the study of Vieira Couto's library will show.

### José Vieira Couto, Europe and the Making of an Enlightened Scholar

Saint-Hilaire was particularly struck by his interaction with José Vieira Couto. Vieira Couto had been born in 1752 in Tejuco, the son of local girl Antônia Teresa do Prado and the Portuguese expatriate Manoel Vieira Couto, one of the many adventurers drawn to colonial Brazil in search of their fortunes during the first half of the eighteenth century, following the discoveries of gold (c.1698) and diamond (c.1720) deposits in Minas Gerais captaincy. Following the discovery of diamonds in the vicinity of Tejuco, the imperial government tried to control production and limit internal migration. Taxes were raised considerably and remained high until 1734, when the Crown decided to close free entry into the diamond region, establishing the exclusive Diamantine Demarcation and setting up its administrative headquarters – the Diamond Intendancy – in Tejuco itself. Vieira Couto's parents undoubtedly fared well under this system; his father found employment in the Intendancy, and the family came to enjoy a distinguished reputation as elite members of their community. They were thus well placed to adapt to changes that were to come later in the century. A royal decree of 1771 abolished the private contract system of mining, turning it into a monopoly of the Crown and leading to the establishment of the 'Royal Diamond Extraction Company', an imperial organ directed by the Diamond Intendant.

As a member of the colonial elite, Vieira Couto travelled to Portugal in 1774 to study philosophy and mathematics at Coimbra University, as there were no universities in Brazil. The experience of studying at Coimbra had a profound effect on his philosophical and political outlook, as it did for many of the 113 students who travelled from Minas Gerais to study there between 1767 and 1789.<sup>25</sup> Although teaching reforms introduced under the influence of the Marquis de Pombal suffered a setback with the ascension of Maria I to the Portuguese throne in 1777, new ideas based on a triumphant rationalism persisted,

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25 See Virgínia Trindade Valadares, *Elites Mineiras Setecentistas: Conjugação de dois Mundos* (Lisboa: Edições Colibri, 2004), pp. 499–501.

particularly in the environment outside the university's walls.<sup>26</sup> Although absolutist limitations were followed and the curriculum was restricted, the non-academic life of registered students could still be radicalised, with students meeting in secret groups outside the classroom and lecture hall, where they discussed new ideas relating to freedom. In Coimbra, the convergence of libertinism, freemasonry and the Enlightenment helped ferment religious, moral and political criticism of the absolutist imperial regime.<sup>27</sup>

The Portuguese Inquisition recognised the danger of exposing so many colonial students to radical currents of thought and complained of the "many alumni who, drinking the poison of libertinism in Coimbra, come to vomit in their birthplaces".<sup>28</sup> Intellectual dialogue and exchange was extensive among Brazilian students, especially those from Minas Gerais, who were registered at various European universities, in particular at Coimbra and Montpellier.<sup>29</sup> From these university towns in the old world, nonconformist ideas spread to the four corners of the Portuguese empire.

Young colonial Brazilians also travelled across Enlightened Europe to learn skills which would benefit colonial industry. Just after he graduated in Coimbra University, Vieira Couto was swiftly dispatched to Europe by dona Maria I. He visited Paris, Holland and Freiberg in 1780 *en route* to examining for himself German mining techniques. He, like other Brazilians, left Brazil when "still young, to learn the much that is known in Europe".<sup>30</sup> We do not know exactly how long the trip lasted, probably a year or two, but by 5 April 1783 he was back in Tejuco and appointed doctor in the local Royal Diamond Extraction Company Hospital.<sup>31</sup>

Vieira Couto soon put his skills to practice as a doctor but also as a naturalist. Between 1799 to 1803, he was repeatedly commissioned to explore Serro do Frio county and other places in the captaincy to identify new methods for the

26 For Pompal's reforms, see Kenneth Maxwell, *Pompal: Paradox of the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

27 David Higgs, 'A Viradeira, Coimbra e a Inquisição', *Universidade(s): História, Memória Perspectivas*, 4 (1991), pp. 295–324.

28 Lisboa. Arquivos Nacionais da Torre do Tombo (ANTT). Inquisição de Lisboa (IL). Processo 16.616.

29 It was common to take courses at one institution and exams in another; see Junia F. Furtaido, 'Estudantes Mineiros em Montpellier', in *O Mundo Francês em Minas* (Belo Horizonte: BDMG Cultural, 2000).

30 Lisboa. Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino. Avulsos de Minas Gerais, cx. 149, doc.73.

31 Princeton. University of Princeton. Firestone Library. Rare Books. Codex Diamond, Cog38 (n.639), f.42. Lisboa. Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino (AHU). Manuscritos Avulsos de Minas Gerais (MAMG). Caixa 145, doc. 46.

exploration of diamonds, gold and the discovery of new minerals like saltpetre, used in the production of gunpowder.<sup>32</sup> Initially, between 1763 and 1779, the crown blamed smuggling for the declining gold production that beset Minas Gerais. But after 1779, when the Royal Academy of Sciences of Lisbon was founded, many studies, such as those by Vieira Couto, highlighted instead the limitations of old-fashioned practices used to explore and extract gold deposits in Brazil and advocated enlightened reform. In December 1798, Vieira Couto was tasked by dona Maria I, under the auspices of the Royal Academy of Sciences of Lisbon, to travel around the diamond-producing region and evaluate its mineralogical potential. In the following year, he wrote up “an exact report of the metals of this district and of the royal interests that one may expect from the same”.<sup>33</sup> In 1801, he was charged with a similar mission, evaluating a new discovery of diamonds around the Indaiá River.<sup>34</sup> Between 1799 and 1802 he wrote *Memórias Econômicas* on these and other expeditions in which he had participated and sent it to the Royal Academy of Sciences of Lisbon.<sup>35</sup>

Vieira Couto's experiences in Europe helped him professionally, allowing him to become an expert in geology and mineralogy, but they also exposed him to wider currents of Enlightenment and radical thought. The religious scepticism and toleration he professed in later life, for example, may have been inspired by his encounters with Jewish Portuguese circles in Holland. For Vieira Couto, as for the intellectual culture to which he belonged, two political stances, both based on enlightened ideas, were possible: either cooperation with the absolute monarchy, deriving from the crown's more enlightened policy toward the Portuguese empire and specifically Minas Gerais, or nonconformity and resistance to the crown, leading potentially to the independence of the captaincy. Vieira Couto at different moments of his life embraced both approaches: in 1780, 1801 and on other occasions he acted under the enlightened

32 José Vieira Couto, *Memórias Sobre a Capitania das Minas Gerais* [1799], edited by Júnia Ferreira Furtado (Belo Horizonte: Fundação João Pinheiro, 1994).

33 Vieira Couto, *Memórias Sobre a Capitania das Minas Gerais*, p. 52. On Vieira Couto's work as a naturalist, see Júnia F. Furtado, 'Estudo Crítico', in Vieira Couto, *Memórias Sobre a Capitania das Minas Gerais*, pp. 13–47; Clarette Paranhos da Silva, *O Desvendar do Grande Livro da Natureza: Um Estudo da Obra do Mineralogista José Vieira Couto, 1798–1805* (São Paulo: Anna Blume/Editora da Unicamp, 2002), and Furtado, 'Enlightenment Science and Iconoclasm', pp. 189–212.

34 José Vieira Couto [1801], 'Memória Sobre as Minas da Capitania de Minas Gerais ... à Maneira de Itinerário', *Revista do Arquivo Público Mineiro*, 10 (1905), pp. 55–166.

35 'Economic Memoirs' was the literary genre of choice for the Royal Academy of Sciences of Lisbon, as the studies of nature that its members carried out in the realm of the Natural Sciences were inseparable from these products' pragmatic economic utility.

direction of the crown in exploring and documenting the natural resources of the captaincy; but in 1789 he became embroiled in the so-called 'Inconfidência Mineira', a conspiracy against the Portuguese crown that sought to create an independent nation in Minas Gerais and Rio de Janeiro.<sup>36</sup>

Planned between 1788–89, the Inconfidência Mineira was largely inspired by the independence movement in the North American colonies, by the Enlightened ideas spread by books Vieira Couto and his fellows read, and by the traditional Portuguese idea of the sovereign power of the people. The rebellion brought together the most important men in Minas Gerais and Rio de Janeiro.<sup>37</sup> There were lawyers, two *ouvidores* (the highest ranking officials in the judiciary), priests, senior military officers, almost all the tax collectors, wealthy merchants, doctors and naturalists. The movement was discovered prematurely and many were arrested, condemned to exile in Africa and – in one case – to death. Although Vieira Couto participated in several meetings where plans were discussed, he was never processed or arrested. The economic importance of those captaincies to the crown and the dangers which would be posed by their independence reoriented Portuguese policy towards Brazil in the following years. Nevertheless, the Inconfidência Mineira remains a foundational event in the memorialisation of the independence movement in Brazil, similar to the French Revolution in France and the Revolutionary War in the United States.<sup>38</sup>

Surviving information about Vieira Couto's library and wider reading habits offers significant insight into this aspect of his life, showing how the Luso-Brazilian world – and especially the diamond district of Minas Gerais – was connected by print to debates being waged between and within Enlightened

36 On the "Inconfidência Mineira" movement, see Kenneth Maxwell, *Conflicts and Conspiracies: Brazil & Portugal, 1750–1808* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973); Júnia F. Furtado and Heloísa Maria Murguel Starling, 'República e Sedição na Inconfidência Mineira: Leituras do *Recueil* por uma Sociedade de Pensamento', in Kenneth Maxwell (ed.), *O Livro de Tiradentes: Transmissão Atlântica de Ideias Políticas no Século XVIII* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2013), pp. 107–132.

37 Márcio Jardim identified no fewer than eighty-four participants: fifteen military men, sixty-two civilians (many of them employees of the imperial administration and tax officials), and seven priests, although only twenty-four were arrested and prosecuted; *A Inconfidência Mineira: Uma Síntese Factual* (Rio de Janeiro: Biblex, 1989), pp. 46–310.

38 It continues to be celebrated as a national holiday on 21 April, marking the date of the execution of its main defendant, Tiradentes. The independence of Brazil came only in 1822, after the court went back to Portugal. From 1821 to 1822, dom Pedro, later the first of Brazil, governed a United Kingdom of Brazil (to Portugal) in a monarchical regime. The Republic was established in 1989 with the expulsion of the royal family.

elites in Europe. Vieira Couto's example demonstrates that, within the captaincy, heterodox ideas concerning religion, politics, social and moral reform were diffused in the pages of books privately acquired from Europe and extensively circulated among friends, neighbours and associates.

Vieira Couto was part of an inner group among the rebels whose task was to plan the new society they were going to settle following independence. The group included lawyers, doctors, naturalists and judges educated mostly in Coimbra and Montpellier universities, where some of them had met and sworn their commitment to the captaincy's independence. This society of thought shared many ideals among its members. The books and readings they shared were important bases for the formulation of their thought, forming a true 'literary underground'.<sup>39</sup> They were not alone in their actions: intellectuals in other parts of Brazil and Spanish America were connected to a wider intellectual book culture spreading throughout the Atlantic world. For example, in the viceroyalty of Nueva Granada, the libraries of Clemente Ruiz (the first naturalist to undertake an Enlightened voyage through the region), José Celestino Mutiz, Francisco Antonio Zea and Antonio Nariño, among others, held books which their contemporaries considered the bedrock of the seditious ideas they shared.<sup>40</sup> Through the arrival of new and recent books, readers in colonial Brazil engaged with the latest philosophical, historiographical and scientific texts as they emerged in Europe, especially those related to the French and Scottish Enlightenment.

### *Building a Library in Colonial Brazil*

In his house on Bonfim Street, Vieira Couto kept a substantial library, with a varied and eclectic assortment of books. This collection reveals a sophisticated and educated elite bibliophile, fully aware of European ideas and habits.<sup>41</sup> Vieira Couto's collection was of a significant size for the period, comprising 226

39 Robert Darnton, *Bohème Littéraire et Révolution: Le Monde des Livres au XVIII<sup>e</sup> Siècle* (Paris: Galimard 1983).

40 Renán Silva, *Los Ilustrados de Nueva Granada 1760–1808: Genealogía de Una Comunidad de Interpretación* (Medellín. Fondo Editorial Universidad EAFIT, 2008), pp. 279, 262, 263, 262–263.

41 On Minas Gerais see Luís Carlos Villalta, 'Os Clérigos e os Livros nas Minas Gerais da Segunda Metade do Século XVIII', *Acervo: Revista do Arquivo Nacional*, 8 (1995), n. 1–2, pp. 19–25; Luís Carlos Villalta, 'O Diabo na Livraria dos Inconfidentes', in Adauto Novais (ed.), *Tempo e História* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1992), pp. 367–395; Joaci Furtado, *Uma República de Leitores: História e Memória na Recepção das Cartas Chilena* (São Paulo: Hucitec, 1997); Joaci Furtado, 'Uma Utopia Para o Passado: A Inconfidência Mineira nas Cartas Chilenas', *LPH: Revista de História*, 5 (1995), pp. 138–143.

titles in some 601 volumes.<sup>42</sup> Many of his books, of course, related to medicine and natural history, areas he engaged with on a daily basis. As with other libraries of this period, some books revealed his familiarity with the ideas of the French Enlightenment.<sup>43</sup> There were Montesquieu's complete works, including *L'Esprit des Lois* (1748); two volumes of Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encyclopédie Pratique ou Etablissement de Grand Nombre de Manufactures* (1751–72); and Volney's *Les ruines, ou, Méditation sur les révolutions des empires* (1791). But that was not all.<sup>44</sup> By poking through his bookshelves in more detail, we can shed light on the intellectual development of a Luso-Brazilian naturalist and doctor on the threshold of the nineteenth century. In the scope of his holdings, we may also glimpse his vision of the world, especially in terms of nature, politics and religion, which were intrinsically bound together.

Vieira Couto's collection demonstrates a broad chronological scope, ranging from works of classical antiquity to those of the most innovative scientists of the early nineteenth century. Let us examine a few examples from one of the thematic sections of his library – medicine – as these books would have been essential for his professional practice. In this section, one finds everything from classic studies to recent publications that transformed the field's principles and practices. He owned Hippocrates's *Aphorisms* – a gem of antiquity, and a foundational text at the heart of the Hippocratic-Galenic method practiced at the time – as well as recent revisions of the Hippocratic corpus, such as Jannes de Gorter's *Medicina Hippocratica exponens Aphorismos Hippocratis* (Venice, 1795). New theories, classifications and treatments were present as well: Boerhaave's *Aphorismi de cognoscendis et curandis morbis* (1709), which transformed knowledge of anatomy and the functioning of the human body; recent commentaries on Gerard Swieten's work, published between 1773–75; *Apparatus ad nosologiam methodicam* (1775) and *The Edinburgh Practice of Physic, Surgery, and Midwifery* (1803), both by the Scottish physician William Cullen, who had introduced a new system for nosology, or the classification of diseases. There were also works on new medical techniques and equipment, such as *Da Vacina* by the Brazilian Melo Franco, who supported vaccination against smallpox, and *Observations sur les causes et les accidents*

42 A list of books annexed to the inventory of José Vieira Couto can be found in: Rio de Janeiro. Arquivo Nacional. Inventário n° 417, caixa 1.409, galeria A. The list is partly transcribed in Paulo Gomes Leite, 'Contestação e Revolução na Biblioteca de Vieira Couto', *Revista Minas Gerais*, 27 (1990), pp. 23–29, at p. 23.

43 Friero, *O Diabo na Livraria do Cônego* (São Paulo. Edusp, 1981).

44 Leite, 'A Cultura do Tejuco', pp. 22–26; Leite, 'Contestação e Revolução na Biblioteca de Vieira Couto', pp. 23–29.

*de plusieurs accouchements laborieux* (1780), which introduced the use of forceps for greater success in deliveries during childbirth. His latest acquisition, *Mémoire sur l'éducation classique des jeunes médecins* by François-Christophe Florimond de Mercy, was published in the year of his death in 1827, indicating that he continued to update his medical knowledge even towards the end of his life.

Vieira Couto's medical books reflect the comprehensive and up-to-date medical training of an increasing number of medical professionals lured to Minas Gerais by the region's increasing population and prosperity. At that time, medicine in Portugal and its colonies, as in Europe, was split into two divisions, one more erudite, the preserve of university-educated doctors, and the other more practical, exercised by surgeons, barbers and midwives.<sup>45</sup> To build capacity within the profession, the Portuguese government sponsored students to attend courses in medicine and anatomy at Coimbra, Paris, Montpellier and Edinburgh.<sup>46</sup> Armed with this training, doctors and surgeons transformed medical practice by paying close attention in their daily encounters with the natural diversity of the flora and fauna of the captaincy and the different diseases affecting its large population. Several wrote dissertations on health and natural history. Vieira Couto assisted another Coimbra alumnus, Dr Francisco Vieira, conduct tests in the local hospital that led to his discovery of two new species of cinchona.<sup>47</sup> Inácio Ferreira da Câmara wrote a medical doctorate thesis at Montpellier on how to find and measure the exact amount of mercury to treat syphilis, a method that he later took to Minas Gerais. Francisco de Mello Franco, who also studied in Coimbra, wrote books about hygiene, the psychosomatic origin of several diseases and the importance of vaccination to eradicate smallpox.

Vieira Couto appears to have started collecting books while he was studying at Coimbra, where he bought volumes required for his education, such as *Compêndio Histórico da Universidade de Coimbra* and *Estatutos da Universidade de Coimbra*.<sup>48</sup> These were hardly random acquisitions. The first, written in 1771,

45 See Júnia F. Furtado, 'Tropical Empiricism: Making Medical Knowledge in Colonial Brazil', in James Delbourgo and Nicholas Dew (eds.), *Science and Empire in the Atlantic World* (New York and London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 127–151.

46 ANTT. Casa dos Condes de Galveas. Maço 7. Doc.2. D. João de Almeida de Mello e Castro. Missão em Londres. 7/9/1792.

47 Leite, 'Pornografia, Subversão e Ateísmo na Biblioteca de um Cientista Tejuicano', p. 223.

48 For the books used at the University at that time, see Luís Carlos Villalta, Christianni Cardoso Morais and João Paulo Martins, 'As Reformas Ilustradas e a Instrução no Mundo Luso-Brasileiro', in G.A. Luz, J.L.N. Abreu and M.R. Nascimento, *Ordem Crítica: A América Portuguesa nas Fronteiras do Século XVIII* (Belo Horizonte: Fino Traço, 2013), pp. 33–1033.



described the decadent state of the university and the need for changes, justifying and forming the basis of the reforms carried out by the Marquis of Pombal the following year. The second, new statutes for the university published in 1772, reflected precisely these changes, embracing the spirit of experimentation and heralding the new scientific bent of the institution's curriculum. Vieira Couto also owned Luís Antônio Verney's *Verdadeiro Método de Estudar para ser útil à Republica e à Igreja* (1746) in two volumes, which advocated new methods of teaching in Portugal and had originally inspired Pombal's reforms. We should not forget that Vieira Couto studied at Coimbra at a time when it was reshaped by Pombaline reforms. His intellectual formation would have been in step with changes that moved to secularise education in the wake of the expulsion of the Jesuits. It was in this period that the university introduced courses in natural sciences, law and mathematics, and created a botanical garden and a scientific laboratory. Naturalist, professor and freemason Domingos Vandelli was an important vector of these transformations, and would later coordinate and draw up instructions for naturalists conducting fieldwork. In this sense, the natural world could be inventoried with the help of Luso-Brazilian naturalists, in the moulds determined by and under the supervision of the state.

Vieira Couto's visit to the German mines marked another important period of book acquisition. Most of the books from this period were of a scientific nature and many were related to mineralogy. Due most likely to the inability of the notary who made the list of Vieira Couto's books to read German, the inventory does not transcribe the titles of "two books in german". So, we do not know their titles except for the *Manuel der Naturalische*, perhaps referring to a 1771 translation of a book of the same name by Frenchmen Buffon, Duchesne and Macquer. Nevertheless, we know that Vieira Couto had access to French editions of the writings of the most prominent German mineralogists, such as Johann Gottlob Lehmann,<sup>49</sup> Christoph Andreas Schlüter<sup>50</sup> and Christian Carl Schindler,<sup>51</sup> and the Swedish scientists Johan Gottskalk Wallerius<sup>52</sup> and Axel

49 Johann Gottlob Lehmann, *L'art des Mines, ou Introduction aux Connaissances Nécessaires pour L'exploitation des Mines* and *Traité de Physique, d'histoire Naturelle, de Minéralogie et de Métallurgie*, both translated by the Baron de Holbach.

50 Christoph Andreas Schlüter, *De la Fonte, des Mines, des Fonderies. Le tout Augmente de Plusieurs Procèdes et Observations et Publie [translated by] par M. Hellot*.

51 Christian Carl Schindler, *L'art D'essayer les Mines et les Metaux*, translated by M. Geoffroy, le fils.

52 Johan Gottskalk Wallerius, *Minéralogie, ou Description Générale des Substances du Règne Minéral*, translated from the German.

Frederik Cronstedt.<sup>53</sup> These works were joined on Vieira Couto's bookshelves by a wide range of practical works on mineralogy in several languages. These ranged from the old-fashioned *Metallurgie ou Art de Tirer et Purifier les Métaux* by the Spaniard Álvaro Afonso Barba, a work heavily influenced by alchemy and published in 1669, to Robert Jameson's *System of Mineralogy*, published in Edinburgh in 1808, which proposed a more scientific and rational classification of the mineral elements.

Significantly, Vieira Couto's tour to the German mines also allowed him to buy books that were banned from circulating in Portugal due to their seditious content. In Amsterdam, he bought Joannis Clerici's *Ars Critica* on 8 October 1780, as he noted on the front cover of his copy. It was likely also there that, influenced by contact with the local Sephardic Portuguese community, he bought the *History of the Jews* by the Roman writer Flavius Josephus (37-c.100), which shed light on the history of the Jews during the first century of the Christian era, and described their rebellion against Roman domination.

Even from the little village of Tejuco, Vieira Couto continued purchasing, receiving and selling books, an indication that geographic distance could not keep the latest publications from circulating. For example, his copy of the first edition of Fourcroy's *Système des Connaissances Chimiques* (1801) was acquired on 15 June 1804. This was made possible through his aforementioned relationship with Simão Pires Sardinha, who bought books in Lisbon.<sup>54</sup> Though remote, Tejuco became a market for books. Owning these illicit volumes allowed intellectual elites to access, read and discuss the latest European publications, configuring a sphere of public opinion in the form of a literary underground.

### The Library Subjects

Natural History constituted the largest of the three divisions of Vieira Couto's library. Of the 226 books that Vieira Couto owned, 118 had to do with natural history, representing fifty-three percent of the whole and 54.4 percent of the 217 catalogued and classified books. Many of these works, as we have already seen, were directly tied either to the practice of medicine or to the study of nature, with an emphasis on mineralogy and chemistry.<sup>55</sup> The category with the greatest

53 Axel Fredrik Cronstedt, *Essai d'une Nouvelle Minéralogie, Traduit du Suédois* (de A.F. Cronstedt) et de l'allemand de M. Wiedman.

54 ANTT. IL. Maço 28, Processo nº16.966. Denúncia contra Simão Pires Sardinha. Mariana 22 de agosto de 1802.

55 Only nine (four percent) could not be identified, as their titles were transcribed incompletely. To study the subjects of the library I used the system proposed by Daniel

number of books was medicine, with thirty-six; mineralogy, metallurgy and geology had twenty-three; while other subjects tied to the study of nature (botany, agriculture, art and crafts) came to twenty-five titles. The last were essential for carrying out the examination and study of the territories of the captaincy.

Some perhaps surprising genres could be found in the Natural History division. For instance, travel books such as *Travels into the Interior Parts of Africa* and *Voyages au Montamiata* expressed not only the period's taste for exploring the world, they also served as inspiration for Vieira Couto's research reports, some of which were written in the style of travel guides.<sup>56</sup> The presence of *Voyages au Montamiata*, by George Santi, Professor of Natural History at the University of Pisa, reveals the influence of Vieira Couto's teacher in Coimbra, Domingos Vandelli, who introduced his students to the Italian Enlightenment's distinctive practical-utilitarian approach to naturalism. It also points to the eclecticism of Vieira Couto's collecting habits and reading experiences, reinforcing not only the cosmopolitan intellectual outlook of educated local elites in colonial Brazil, but also the continued need to revise conventional Eurocentric interpretations of the Enlightenment by 'national context', pointed out most recently by Silvia Sebastiani.<sup>57</sup> In addition to these travel books, Vieira Couto also owned a guide to how the naturalist ought to travel, entitled *Observations sur les voyageurs*, inserted within Corneille de Pauw's *Recherches Philosophiques sur les Américains*. His library also probably boasted volumes of the April 1666 edition of *Transactions Philosophiques*,<sup>58</sup> including Robert Boyle's famous recommendations on how to keep a proper record of one's travels,<sup>59</sup> with the aim of producing a "good Natural History, to build upon, in time, a Solid and Useful Philosophy".<sup>60</sup>

Humanities constituted the second largest division of the library collection. It included ninety-eight works, representing 43.3 percent of the total and

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Roche, as the notary did not use any kind of classification. Daniel Roche, 'Um Savant et sa Bibliothèque au XVIII<sup>e</sup> Siècle', *Dix-huitième Siècle*, 1 (1969), pp. 47–88.

56 The need to standardise observations of nature and their travel report style is a typical feature of Enlightenment literature. "The practice of traveling [was] an activity connected both to the interests of the metropolis and to the advancement of knowledge, an activity at the very heart of the political, economic, and cultural construction of the West"; Juan Pimentel, *Testigos del Mundo: Ciencia, Literature y Viajes en la Ilustración* (Madrid: Marcial Pons Historia, 2003), p. 53.

57 Silvia Sebastiani, *Scottish Enlightenment: Race, Gender and the Limits of Progress* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

58 We cannot say precisely what copies Vieira Couto owned, but he references volumes from the year 1687, and it is possible that he also owned the volume for 1666.

59 *General Heads for the Natural History of a Country*.

60 Pimentel, *Testigos del Mundo*, p. 57.

45.1 percent of the classified works. The best represented subject in this division was history, which was also the second-largest category of books after medicine overall, with a total of thirty-one titles. Vieira Couto's historical collection included landmark works by David Hume and Edward Gibbon, the *History of England* and the *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, as well as works of a more openly radical bent such as William Belsham's Whiggish *History of Great Britain*, which defended the American Revolution. Running through many of Vieira Couto's books on history, moral philosophy and political economy was the importance of free thinking and the use of reason. The Enlightenment authors of these works saw their role as actors in the historical process and their actions were always preceded by reflection. Many of Vieira Couto's books emphasised the importance of keeping one's spirit open to observation and letting doubt come before conclusions. In one of his books, Jean de Senebier advised philosophers that "dogmatism was the worst enemy of observation" and that "philosophical doubt should extend to everything that exists about the object being studied, from the ideas of others to those of great men, whose authority is generally irresistible".<sup>61</sup> Indeed, Vieira Couto likely agreed with much mainstream Enlightenment thought that "the investigation into the progress of society ... [should take] place in the fields of moral philosophy, history, and political economy".<sup>62</sup> Thus the political economy section of the library included *Pesanteur spécifique des corps – ouvrage utile à l'histoire naturelle, à la Physique, aux arts & au commerce* by M. Bris, *Dictionnaire Universel de la Géographie Commercante* by Jacques Peuchet, and *Dictionnaire géographique et critique*, by Bruzen de la Martière, in which geography was understood as an encyclopaedic genre encompassing all the world's discourses – a form of universal knowledge, rather than being specialised in just one field or another.

In terms of literature, the Greek poet Sappho rubbed shoulders with the Renaissance classic *Don Quixote*, verse written by Camões celebrating Portugal's discoveries, and James Thomson's *The Seasons* (1730), which had inaugurated a more naturalist aesthetic in poetry, free from rhetorical exaggerations. Vieira Couto owned *The Adventures of Telemachus* by Fénelon, an influential novel that had established itself as one of the favourite texts of the moment among Iberian-American intellectual elites.<sup>63</sup> The lessons of the

61 Jean Senebier, *Essai sur L'Art d'observer et de Faire des Experiences* (Paris: Paschoud 1802), pp. 97, 101.

62 Sebastiani, *Scottish Enlightenment*, p. 4.

63 Silva, *Los Ilustrados de Nueva Granada 1760–1808*, p. 252; Christoph Schmitt-Maaß, Stefanie Stockhorst and Doohwan Ahn, *Fenelon in the Enlightenment: Traditions, Adaptations, and*

central character Mentor became an influential model of morality and virtue throughout the eighteenth century, but Fénelon's text also reflected on how different places utilised their economic resources,<sup>64</sup> showing American readers the connection between progress, nature and, of course, revolution. The breadth of languages included in Vieira Couto's library, like others of the period, was eclectic.<sup>65</sup> The library contained works in Portuguese, French, Spanish, German, English, Italian and Latin. No fewer than five foreign-language dictionaries, which composed the final (and smallest) division of the collection, facilitated his cosmopolitan engagement with books drawn from across Enlightenment Europe.

### Borrowed Books and Shared Readings

Struck and impressed as we may be by the sheer range and depth of Vieira Couto's book collection, however, the inventory of his books – as with all such sources in library history – accounts for only those books he actually owned at the time of his death. It does not include those he might have owned previously and then discarded; nor, significantly, does it include all that he read over the course of what was clearly a very active and assiduous life of reading. Further titles, banned from circulating in the Portuguese empire, may have been hidden by his relatives; others may have been read without his ever having owned them. Similarly, the inventory gives no sense of how far the cosmopolitanism of Vieira Couto's books shaped the wider book culture within colonial Brazil, by being lent out to Vieira Couto's friends, neighbours and associates, and to others in his society of thought.

It is significant, therefore, that there are other indications that like-minded members of Vieira Couto's intellectual circle shared books amongst themselves. Free thinkers as these men were, some of these readings provoked heated discussions,<sup>66</sup> as occurred with *Histoire Philosophique et politique des*

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*Variations* (Internationale Forschungen Zur Allgemeinen Und Vergleichende; Amsterdam: Brill/Rodopi, 2014).

64 João Paulo Martins, 'História e Romance: A Ideia de História em *As Aventuras de Telêmaco* e as Relações Entre o Texto Histórico e a Prosa Ficcional na Passagem dos Séculos XVII–XVIII', *História da Educação*, 21 (Jan/Apr 2007), p. 190.

65 Silva, *Los Ilustrados de Nueva Granada 1760–1808*, p. 274.

66 Guilherme and Lúcia Pereira das Neves analyse the library of the enlightened Brazilian Francisco Agostinho Gomes (1769–1822) through the list of volumes he had sent to Brazil. They conclude that his library reflects the "embarrassed" Luso-Brazilian Enlightenment; Lúcia Bastos Pereira das Neves and Guilherme Pereira das Neves, 'A Biblioteca de Francisco

*établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les Deux Indes*,<sup>67</sup> by Abbé Raynal, first published in 1770 and *Recueil de Lois Constitutives des Etats Unis de L'Amerique*.<sup>68</sup> Vieira Couto owned neither of these books, but quoted them in his writings.<sup>69</sup> He also discussed them intensely with members of his circle, fantasising over the utopian ideal that they might one day emulate the North Americans by winning independence from Portugal for Minas Gerais and Rio de Janeiro.<sup>70</sup> The first work allowed the rebels to establish a link between themselves and the independence of the American colonies,<sup>71</sup> as the book was read as presenting a formula to be followed in order to replicate the uprising in Portuguese America. Abbé Raynal was considered a writer of great vision because he foretold the uprising of North America, linking the right of colonial rebellion against the crown and its excessive tax demands to the vexation, oppression, restriction or suppression of local government and the disorder of

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Agostinho Gomes: A Permanência da Ilustração Luso-Brasileira entre Portugal e o Brasil', *Revista do Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro*, 165 (2004), n. 425, pp. 11–28. I strongly disagree with the existence of an atypical, restrained and deformed Luso-Brazilian Enlightenment; see Júnia Ferreira Furtado, *Oráculos da Geografia Iluminista, Dom Luís da Cunha e Jean Baptiste Bourguignon d'Anville na Invenção do Brasil* (Belo Horizonte: Ed. UFMG 2012), pp. 71–146; see also István Jansco, 'A Sedução da Liberdade: Cotidiano e Contestação Política no Final do Século XVIII', in Laura de Mello e Souza (ed.), *História da Vida Privada no Brasil: Cotidiano e Vida Privada na América Portuguesa* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1997), i. 387–43, who discusses the ideas of egalitarianism and revolution in the Bahia rebellion of 1799.

- 67 On Raynal's interpretation of the Portuguese America in the different editions of this book, see Júnia Ferreira Furtado and Nuno Gonçalo Monteiro, 'The Different Brazils in Abbé Raynal's *Histoire des Deux Indes*', *Varia Historia*, 32 (Sept/Dec 2016), n. 60, pp. 731–777.
- 68 On *Recueil* see Kenneth Maxwell, 'Uma História Atlântica', in *O Livro de Tiradentes*, pp. 3–106.
- 69 At least it is not listed on his library inventory, although it was common to hide forbidden books like those by Raynal from notaries. On the use of Raynal's books in Vieira Couto's writings see Júnia Ferreira Furtado, 'Sédition, Hérésie et Rébellion sous les Tropiques: la Bibliothèque du Naturaliste José Vieira Couto', in Eliana de Freitas Dutra and Jean-Yves Mollier (eds.), *L'imprimé dans la Construction de la Vie Politique. Brésil, Europe et Amériques (XVIII<sup>e</sup>–XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle)* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2015), pp. 43–57.
- 70 *Autos da Devassa da Inconfidência Mineira (Adim)* (Belo Horizonte: Imprensa Oficial, 1976), i. 189.
- 71 On the rebels' readings of Raynal, see Furtado, 'Sedição, Heresia e Rebelião nos Trópicos', pp. 80–81. On the book's impact in Brazil, see João Paulo Garrido Pimenta, 'De Raynal a De Pratt: Apontamentos para um Estudo da Ideia de Emancipação da América e sua Leitura no Brasil', *Almanack Braziliense*, 11 (2010), pp. 88–99.

the local authorities controlling their subjects.<sup>72</sup> The second book, the *Recueil*, was a particular inspiration in the planning of the new government. The admiration for North American independence and the new nation being formed there was a common element in this society of thought.<sup>73</sup> While they sipped their coffee, they used these two books to discuss the key points in preparing an uprising, the system of government they would erect later, and the laws that they planned to implement.<sup>74</sup>

The example of the uprising in North America, which “was quite fresh” in their memories, was vital for the imitation, whenever possible, of tactics and strategies employed in the fight for independence as well as the establishment of a new government. As for what had happened in the American Revolution and in the recently liberated republic, information came to Minas in the books that these men read. In this sense, the large history section in Vieira Couto’s library takes on a potentially seditious bent. Important books on British (Hume and Belsham) and American history (Corneille de Pauw), and significant interest in the topic of the decline of empires (Gibbon and Volney) and the uprising of the oppressed (Josephus) all took on new meanings when read in this specific context. For example, de Pauw’s treatment of the massacre of Native Americans by the Spanish in the *Recherches Philosophiques sur les Américains* unfurled a physiocratic apology for agriculture to the detriment of mining, and argued for the independence of the colonies. Vieira Couto was a defender of physiocracy as a strategy for resolving the decadence of gold extraction in Minas Gerais. Books on North America were staples of the libraries of the revolutionary lettered elites of Spanish America, who were obsessed with French discourses on Spanish decadence. As for the latter, Vieira Couto owned a French translation of *Rétablissement des Manufactures et du Commerce d’Espagne* (1753), from Bernardo de Ulloa’s 1740 original.

72 “A short while ago a general loaded with money had left this Country (Minas) and another was already on the way to do the same”; *Adim*, i. 173.

73 They discussed the American Revolution in depth on a number of occasions, as revealed in the testimonies of Nicolau George and others; Furtado, ‘Sedição, Heresia e Rebelião nos Trópicos’, pp. 79–86.

74 *Adim*, i. 118, 308. On José Joaquim da Rocha, see Júnia F. Furtado, ‘José Joaquim da Rocha and the Proto-Independence Movement in Colonial Brazil’, in Martin Brückner, (ed.) *Early American Cartographies* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), pp. 116–141.

### Books, Irreligiosity and Sedition

In Minas Gerais, as in Europe, Enlightenment ideas became fused with licentious practices, with sometimes dangerous consequences for those involved. In Vieira Couto's case, radical political ideas merged with unconventional attitudes to church teachings and social conventions, including on marriage and family life. Accusations against individuals from Minas Gerais, including Vieira Couto, by the Inquisition revealed the intimate association that was thought to exist between irreligion and sedition, between Libertinism and the Enlightenment. In this respect, I disagree with Jonathan Israel who postulates the existence of a Radical Enlightenment in places like France, the Netherlands and England, and a conformist and Catholic Enlightenment, or Enlightened 'despotism', in Portugal and Spain.<sup>75</sup> The treatment of Luso-Brazilian men by the Inquisition and their behaviour throughout their lives shows that these ideas coexisted not only in the Iberian Peninsula but also frequently in men who were otherwise good subjects and devoted their lives in service to the crown.<sup>76</sup>

One striking characteristic of Vieira Couto's library is its lack of religious books, something quite rare for the captaincy in this period, with not even a copy of the Bible. The only religious book, Josephus's *History of the Jews*, was historically oriented, but gives us a clue as to the owner's (ir)religious beliefs, strongly marked by the scepticism characteristic of Jewish circles in Amsterdam. The spread of Enlightenment thought in Minas Gerais was accompanied by undercurrents of atheism and libertinism, as was the case elsewhere, such as in France or among students at Coimbra. The term 'libertine' was first used by Calvin to refer to Anabaptist dissidents. It originally referred to those who held up Nature as the sole source of morality, freely interpreted the Bible and argued for the freedom of custom, defying the notion of sin established by ecclesiastical authorities. "The original meaning was soon broadened to include identification with progressivism over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – libertine as atheistic, Deistic, and free-thinking", explains one scholar.<sup>77</sup> One must understand the association between libertinism,

75 Jonathan Israel, 'Enlightenment! Which Enlightenment?' *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 67.3 (2006).

76 Furtado, 'José Joaquim da Rocha and the Proto-Independence Movement in Colonial Brazil'; Júnia F. Furtado, 'Um Cartógrafo Rebelde? José Joaquim da Rocha e a Cartografia de Minas Gerais', *Anais do Museu Paulista*, 17.2 (2009), pp. 155–187.

77 Mansur Barata, *Maçonaria, Sociabilidade Ilustrada e Independência do Brasil (1790–1822)* (São Paulo/Juiz de Fora: Annablume/EDUFJF-FAPESP, 2006), pp. 37–38.



heresy and sedition to understand fully the critiques that Vieira Couto's circle posed about the social, religious and political system in which they lived, particularly given its unshakeable devotion to the concept of the divine right of kings in Portugal.

This link between various forms of nonconformity is evident in several of Vieira Couto's books. Volney's *Les Ruines* criticised Catholicism. Erasmus of Rotterdam, in his *Colloquia Familiaria*, was a harsh critic of the Catholic Church, denouncing "the monks as constant clients of prostitutes and advised a girl who desired to remain a virgin to 'avoid those lusty and big-bellied monks. Chastity is in greater danger within the cloister than without'". Genovese, author of *Elementa Metaphysicae* (1743), had his writings declared heretical and was condemned by the Archbishop of Naples, who removed him from his position as theology teacher in that city.<sup>78</sup> The *Encyclopédie*, organised by Diderot and D'Alembert, was considered an incisive instrument in the service of the critical spirit, wielded by critical thinkers against the political and religious elements of the time. As for the books that Simão Pires Sardinha sent Vieira Couto, it was alleged that "they tried to say that there was no hell, because when a creature dies its soul goes to frolic in the Elysian Fields".<sup>79</sup>

By the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the Inquisition had turned its attention towards those who professed atheism, tolerance, libertinism and Masonic ideas, tellingly inspired by the reading of so-called "French books" of precisely the kind found in Vieira Couto's library.<sup>80</sup> Accusations posed against Minas Gerais natives (and those of Tejuco in particular) by the Inquisition revealed that among them, libertinism, irreligiosity, sedition and Enlightenment thought were intimately linked.<sup>81</sup> When Antônio Modesto Mayer was accused of libertinism in 1784, for example, he confessed that he knew "that rumours cast him as a man suspect in matters of religion", as he had made a number of heretical declarations. The first was that, in addressing someone who had made reference to the "discourses of God", he had said, "God does

78 Leite, 'Contestação e Revolução na Biblioteca de Vieira Couto', p. 28.

79 ANTT. IL. Maço 28, Processo n.º 16.966. Denúncia contra Simão Pires Sardinha. Mariana 22 de agosto de 1802.

80 Higgs, 'A Viradeira, Coimbra e a Inquisição'.

81 James Wadsworth, *Agents of Orthodoxy: Honor, Status and the Inquisition in Colonial Pernambuco, Brazil* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007); Bruno Feitler, 'A Ação da Inquisição no Brasil: Uma Tentativa de Análise', in Júnia F. Furtado and Maria Leônia Chaves de Resende (eds.) *Travessias Inquisitoriais das Minas Gerais aos Cárceres do Santo Ofício: Diálogos e Trânsitos Religiosos no Império Luso-Brasileiro (Sécs. XVI–XVIII)* (Belo Horizonte: Fino Traço, 2013), pp. 33–49; David M. Giglitz, *Secrecy and Deceit: The Religion of the Crypto-Jews* (Philadelphia/Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1996).

not discourse”.<sup>82</sup> In 1789, Vieira Couto’s friend the lawyer Claudio Manoel da Costa was arrested and accused of being one of the rebels who was trying to make Minas Gerais independent. He confessed under interrogation that what had led him to get involved in the uprising was “his libertinism, his bad habits and his wicked slander”.<sup>83</sup> Significantly, when the Inquisition tracked Vieira Couto’s own brother, José Joaquim Vieira Couto, across the Atlantic to Lisbon in 1791, he would confess that he had taken part in some libertine activities, but only while living in Tejuco.<sup>84</sup>

Given the tenor and tone of some of the accusations against them, the colonial population certainly seems to have understood the meaning of the term. Vieira Couto’s aunt, Francisca de Ávila e Silva, denounced Simão Pires Sardinha to the Inquisition as “one of the first libertine who entered this country”, testifying that he had stated “it was no sin to have intercourse with women without marrying them”.<sup>85</sup> In light of such charges, the decision of Vieira Couto, Pires Sardinha, Manoel da Costa and other members of their circle to cohabit with female companions – but not to marry them – takes on deeper meanings. What the complainants and inquisitors saw as immoral behaviour was actually part of a systematic world view that rejected the notion of sin, was contrary to celibacy, refuted the moral principles advocated by the Catholic religion and advocated a closer experience of the laws of the natural world – quite apart from advocating revolution and independence in the political realm.

It is clear, then, that these educated men were widely thought to have fused Enlightenment philosophy with a dose of licentious practices and ideals. Libertine books that the inquisitors generally referred to as ‘French’ were adjudged to be the foundation for much of the heterodox content in their moral, religious and political ideology. Thus José Vieira Couto was accused by the Inquisition on 13 May 1789 of possessing heretical books, blaspheming against the faith and cohabiting with a married woman. The accusation stated that he “was a heretic, and so libertine that he neither attended Mass nor confessed; and said that there was no Hell and that it was all a Portuguese fib [and] that when in Holland, he had confessed his sins to the wall”.<sup>86</sup> In the investigation that followed, his companion, Thomázia, declared that he had said to her that mere fornication was no sin; that he could prove that God never came to Earth; that he had always gone about his life in keeping with the laws of Calvin, Luther

82 ANTT. IL. Maço 28. Processo 13.687.

83 *ADIM*, ii. 128, 134.

84 Furtado, ‘Estudo Crítico’, pp. 20–27; ANTT. IL. Maço 28. Processo 16.809.

85 ANTT. IL. Maço 28. Processo 16.966.

86 All referred to ANTT. IL. Maço 1076, Processo 12.957.

and other Protestants; that there was no Hell, as “all this talk of Hell was like a bogeyman invented to scare children, and that there was no such thing”; that the soul was not immortal and that Holland and France were truly fine places to live, as there each followed his own laws.

Several witnesses testified to his not attending Mass, and charged that on the infrequent occasions when he did attend, he displayed somewhat unorthodox behaviour, casting libidinous glances at women, failing to make the customary signs and even calling Tejuco's parish priest a drunk. Witnesses also claimed that the vessels for his ideas were books, especially a Dutch volume that was always in his pocket.<sup>87</sup> Indeed, it is telling how often Vieira Couto's books – and his reading of them, alone or in company – featured in the charges against him. On his return voyage to Brazil, secular reading brought him into collision with the ship's authorities, its captain and priest. It was alleged that “in place of reading some pious book, he set himself to reading books of history, or of medicine ... the scandal was such that the ship's captain quarrelled and argued with him over this libertinism”. He was then accused by the priest of failing to attend Mass and instead reading a French book that was always with him. Once settled back home in Tejuco, when he wished to prove to his companion Thomázia that confession was useless, “he showed her little books or read them to her”. He did the same with his aunt: “to persuade [her of] things against our faith and confirm it ... he had read her a book that he carried in his pocket, which confirmed the heresies he was saying”. That book was probably *Ars Critica*, by Jean Le Clerc, who was a defender of religious tolerance, and whose interpretations of the Divine Trinity, original sin and other religious dogmas were considered heterodox by the Catholic Church.

Thus a central element in the Inquisition's accusations against Vieira Couto was his shared reading of a number of banned books. Books, especially those French publications considered libertine and Jacobin, were the basis for much of the content considered heterodox in moral, religious or political terms. The argument here is not that the mere possession of banned books was sufficient to provoke an uprising or revolution. Vieira Couto's brother, José Joaquim, would say much the same when he was found to own several such volumes. He stated that “reading books, and knowing how to read them, without abuse, was permitted”; for those who could resist the seductive ideas contained

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87 There is no indication what this might have been, but it is tempting to imagine a volume by that “supreme bogeyman of Early Enlightenment Europe” Spinoza nestling in Couto's pocket; for the role of Dutch writers in the radical Enlightenment, see Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 29, 159.

within them, their effect could be “quite the opposite, serv[ing] to support the maintenance of its ends, respecting the laws of decency, and of respect to the Church and the State”. Antônio Modesto Mayer, when confronted with the fact that reading banned books had inspired heretical ideas in him, would protest “that the false principles of those writings did not for a moment make him hesitate as to the truths of our holy religion”.<sup>88</sup> Despite this defence, it was clear that these works corroded the pillars upon which absolutist states rested – law, faith and King – and it was not by chance that the Inquisition associated libertinism and insubordination to the possession of them.

### Conclusion

The library of naturalist and doctor José Vieira Couto, and the readings he shared with other members of his society of thought, show conclusively that Enlightened books thought to be “injurious to religion, the state, or customs” were circulating in colonial Brazil, even though it remained technically illegal to import them from Europe.<sup>89</sup> Far from being insulated from the radical dimensions of Enlightenment thought, these men found that such books emerged as an important source of inspiration that shaped their thoughts. Through the reading and shared discussion of these philosophical books, Vieira Couto and his intellectual circle formulated ideas that defied religion and the state, and were the basis for revolutionary and independent movements. As was the case with Enlightenment France, eighteenth-century Minas Gerais boasted its own literary underground, replete with ideas of sedition and libertinism. By reading certain books, this society of thought could share a radical political culture, shot through with religious, moral and political heterodoxy.

88 ANTT. IL. Processo n° 12.957, Processo contra José Vieira Couto. Mariana 12 de maio de 1789. and Processo contra José Joaquim Vieira Couto. Mariana 1 de abril de 1800. ANTT. IL. Processo n° 16.809.

89 Robert Darnton, *L'univers de la Littérature Clandestine*, p. 14.

## PART 2

### *Revolution and Nation Building*





## Uncommon Knowledge: Late Eighteenth-Century American Subscription Library Collections

*Cheryl Knott*

Access to books, or to printed information more broadly, is a form of access to others: others' minds (in nonfiction), others' imaginations (fiction, poetry) and others' actions (newspapers). Although those categories are oversimplified and overlapping, print, in addition to taking the form of material objects, represents transactions between and among people. For Benedict Anderson, the relationship involves a national imaginary operating in a context of "print-capitalism" and constructed partly from one material representation of it, the newspaper, which he sees as a kind of book. Anderson asserts that the temporary utility of news stories was central to the newspaper's ability to create a sense of simultaneity in disparate readers who imagined themselves part of a larger group being informed about the same events at about the same time. But the newspaper offered an additional kind of simultaneity, the pastiche of articles that had in common only their timing, not their topics. Both kinds of simultaneity – what Anderson calls "simultaneous consumption" and "calendrical coincidence" – contributed to individuals' identification with others' minds, imaginations and actions, but also with others as inhabitants of a common political, economic and social formation, the nation.<sup>1</sup>

Trish Loughran has criticised Anderson's theory as a "fantasy about the ability of print to erase local differences and to install, in their place, a formal homogeneity, whether in fact or in feeling".<sup>2</sup> Recounting the diary of a British functionary and his failed efforts to regulate and standardise mail delivery in the American colonies on the eve of revolution, Loughran argues that print culture played only a small role in helping individuals imagine themselves as a unified nation because of the scattered and disorganised nature of technologies and people across diverse and distant locales.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2006), pp. 33–36.

<sup>2</sup> Trish Loughran, *The Republic in Print: Print Culture in the Age of U.S. Nation Building, 1770–1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Loughran, *Republic in Print*, pp. 6–14.

Despite their differences, both Anderson and Loughran have an underlying assumption that common knowledge plays a role in shaping a nation, however nascent or imaginary or disjunctive that community may be. Neither Anderson nor Loughran uses evidence from social libraries established during the early republic – whose collections may be construed as representing a body of common knowledge, at least potentially – to make the case for the centrality of print in nation formation, or, conversely, to demonstrate the construction of distinctive local communities. In his study of the Charleston (South Carolina) Library Society, whose exclusive membership included wealthy planters and other members of the town's elite, James Raven asserts that British book imports served as “lifelines of identity”.<sup>4</sup> In a seacoast town fuelled by trade with Britain, the library and its members used books and other luxury goods to signify their cultural cosmopolitanism and their active participation in the secular reading material issued by London printers. Raven points out that Charleston was distinctive for its combination of loyalist sympathies, its steady gaze to the east rather than to the north or south along its own coast, or towards inland settlements to the west, and the wealth produced by a slave-based trade in rice, indigo, cotton and other commodities.<sup>5</sup> Even without that particular combination, however, libraries in other towns displayed a similar reliance on British publishers for their books even as they began incorporating more domestic works in their collections during the early national period. A strong current running through their world was the Enlightenment, a system of thought whose generation and impact were linked not to a particular nation or nations but to the Atlantic rim, north and south, east and west. Beyond the location of the publishers and printers whose products lined the shelves of small American libraries was the dynamic trade that ferried information and opinion throughout the Atlantic world. Much of that information displayed commitments to Enlightenment voiced in books by Hume, Robertson and other eighteenth-century philosophers, theorists and historians born in one country but profoundly interested in engaging readers beyond borders, making “the Enlightenment ... an integral part of transatlantic networks of exchange”.<sup>6</sup>

A consideration of the library collections available to small communities in the early American republic can suggest the ways in which the local and

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4 James Raven, *London Booksellers and American Customers: Transatlantic Literary Community and the Charleston Library Society, 1748–1811* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), p. 7.

5 Raven, *London Booksellers*, pp. 17–20.

6 Susan Manning and Francis D. Cogliano (eds.), *The Atlantic Enlightenment* (Aldershot: Ashgate 2008), p. 17.



national intertwined as well as the ways in which newly independent British subjects continued to be connected to the Atlantic world, a transnational imaginary rooted in trade whose goods included books. A comparative approach that considers the similarities and differences among coastal and interior libraries can help fill in the story of Americans' engagement with local, regional, national and transnational information in printed form. Consequently, this chapter gauges the commonality of library collections in small towns by comparing three New England social libraries – Dorchester, Newburyport and Springfield, Massachusetts – to three in the mid-Atlantic – Carlisle, Fredericktown and Norristown, Pennsylvania.<sup>7</sup>

Subscription libraries became features of the landscape in the newly independent nation, as purveyors of print in a sharing economy that co-existed with capitalism. Such libraries existed on both sides of the Atlantic during the pre-Revolutionary eighteenth century, with Benjamin Franklin's Library Company of Philadelphia, founded in 1731, being one of the earliest and most well-known. But cities like Philadelphia and Charleston were not the only sites of subscription libraries, which increased in number over the course of the eighteenth century. Subscription libraries dotted the American and British landscapes, and residents on both sides of the Atlantic conceptualised the institution in similar ways, as evidenced by their membership and governing framework. Mark Towsey's study of the subscription library established in 1795 in the village of Wigtown, in southwestern Scotland, discusses several organisational features common to such institutions. For example, its membership included not only the professional class represented by the library's founders but also planters from the countryside and even a few widows who could afford the fee to enrol and the annual fee to remain a member. Although married women could not subscribe, the rules allowed members to share books with others in, but not outside, their immediate households. Also, like other libraries in the hinterland, Wigtown's recognised the greater effort people in the countryside had to make to visit the institution and specified longer loan

7 *Rules of the Carlisle Library Company. With a Catalogue of Books Belonging Thereto* (Carlisle: George Kline, [1797]); *Rules and Orders of the Dorchester Library. With a Catalogue of the Books* (Boston: I. Thomas and E.T. Andrews, 1794); *A Catalogue of Books Belonging to the Fredericktown Library Company to which is Prefixed, the Objects, Articles, and Conditions on which the Said Company is Incorporated* (Washington: John Colerick, 1797); *The Constitution and Catalogue of Books, of the Newburyport Library* (Newburyport: Edmund M. Blunt, 1797); *The Act of Incorporation, Bye-laws, and Catalogue of Books, of the Norristown Library Company* (Philadelphia: John Ormrod, 1799); *Catalogue of Books Belonging to the Springfield Library Company* [Springfield: Stebbins, 1796]. All are in digital form in *Early American imprints, Series 1: Evans, 1639–1800*, available from Readex, a division of NewsBank.

periods for them than for the town's residents. Pointing out that subscription libraries promulgated the same or very similar rules throughout the British Isles, Towsey asserts that "the Wigtown Subscription Library was not particularly exceptional".<sup>8</sup> As will be shown, that assertion can be extended to its counterparts across the Atlantic.

In a study of early national New England social libraries, Jesse Shera identified the years from 1790 to 1815 as "a period of vigorous and general expansion".<sup>9</sup> Haynes McMullen found the same to be true for the mid-Atlantic region, documenting the establishment of twelve social libraries in Pennsylvania in the final decade of the eighteenth century.<sup>10</sup> The question of early U.S. libraries as part of a larger print culture on both sides of the Atlantic arises in part because there has been little correspondence between the literature on the history of social libraries written by library science scholars like Shera and McMullen and the literature on print culture written by researchers in history and related disciplines. These two main chroniclers of American social library history did not position their work in the tradition of the history of the book but rather in the narrower realm of the history of libraries, and even more focused, the history of libraries as institutions. Such a focus could lead to what today seem rather dubious conclusions. Jesse Shera asserted that New England's eighteenth-century "network of social libraries was more than a forerunner of the public library pattern – it *was* a public library system based on the ability of the patron to pay for the services he received". Shera dismissed fees as a barrier to access, writing – without offering supporting evidence – "it is quite doubtful whether any serious reader was denied access to the books because of poverty".<sup>11</sup> It is more accurate to use the term 'social' to designate shared libraries whose funding came from individuals able and willing to pay and to reserve the term 'public' for the later institutions supported by everyone who paid taxes whether they used the library or not.<sup>12</sup>

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8 Mark Towsey, 'First Steps in Associational Reading: Book Use and Sociability at the Wigtown Subscription Library, 1795–9', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 103.4 (December 2009), pp. 455–495, at p. 462.

9 Jesse Shera, *Foundations of the Public Library: The Origins of the Public Library Movement in New England, 1629–1855* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), p. 71.

10 Haynes McMullen, 'The Founding of Social Libraries in Pennsylvania, 1731–1876', *Pennsylvania History*, 32.2 (April 1965), p. 137.

11 Shera, *Foundations of the Public Library*, pp. 74–75.

12 'Social libraries' is the more expansive term, including mercantile and mechanics', children's, and women's associations' libraries as well as research collections devoted to a single subject. Within this broad category are subscription libraries, sometimes styled as

Shera identified what he understood to be underlying causes that led men to found shared libraries, including their ability to engage in discretionary spending, their interest in self-improvement and a nationalistic impulse to read and preserve history.<sup>13</sup> None of these factors takes into account developments in mail service, water and land transportation routes or printing and bookselling. Libraries, both privately held and shared, were important to increasingly literate New Englanders during the period of the early republic, especially those in or near towns and villages that had a bookstore where the family library could be augmented and a lending library where a family's horizons could be broadened, as William J. Gilmore has thoroughly documented.<sup>14</sup> David Hall and others agree about the importance of the impact of the local on the wider world, and vice versa. Hall documents the increasing number of presses and booksellers in the North American colonies, the rising importance of Philadelphia as a centre of print and the widening distribution of publications printed abroad and in the new republic by the 1790s.<sup>15</sup> Scholars have tended to consider eighteenth-century subscription libraries as institutions rather than as collections. As institutions, subscription libraries failed – inadvertently or intentionally, depending on the historian – to keep up with modernising reading tastes and the growth in popular publishing in the nineteenth century. As Kenneth Carpenter has asserted, the social library model was unsustainable over time.<sup>16</sup>

But it is useful to consider subscription libraries from the perspective of their creators, who did not know the model they were putting in place would fail. From their perspective, the library was not just an institution – although the founding members deliberately created formal institutions of exchange rather than informal sharing – but also a collection. The subscription library was more than a collection of books; it was also a collection of individuals who operated in a layered environment of local and distant connections. For libraries whose transaction records have not survived, as is the case for the

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library companies, which charged fees for membership. See Haynes McMullen, *American Libraries before 1876* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2000), pp. 22, 63–65.

13 Shera, *Foundations of the Public Library*, pp. 200–37.

14 William J. Gilmore, *Reading becomes a Necessity of Life: Material and Cultural Life in Rural New England, 1780–1835* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1989).

15 David D. Hall, 'The Atlantic Economy in the Eighteenth Century', in Hugh Amory and David D. Hall (eds.), *The History of the Book in America, Volume 1: The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World* (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 2007), pp. 152–162.

16 Kenneth E. Carpenter, 'Libraries', in Robert A. Gross and Mary Kelley (eds.), *The History of the Book in America, Volume 2: An Extensive Republic. Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790–1840* (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 2010), p. 273.

libraries studied here, it is impossible to document what individual subscribers borrowed and presumably read. For libraries whose catalogues have survived, as in this study, the books available to subscribers can offer some, albeit incomplete, evidence of knowledge held, if not consumed, in common. What is useful about looking at a library collection is its collocation of works whose contents touched on themes of community, nation and world. Such collections reflected their readers' own positioning as members of real and virtual communities, nations and worlds.

One method for measuring common knowledge shared (again, at least potentially) within and across cities, towns and villages where libraries existed is the overlap study. Librarians have used collection overlap studies since the 1930s to compare and contrast institutional holdings. They have wanted to evaluate the quality of their collection against a standard recommended collection or an exemplar of careful selection; or they have wanted to arrive at agreement regarding the core collection needed by a particular kind of library; or they have wished to identify materials to acquire to improve their holdings. The technique is simple: checking one list against another and recording the results (by hand early in the method's history and by computer later). The meaning of the overlap is not so simple, however, particularly when large collections designed to serve specific local purposes are compared.<sup>17</sup>

An overlap study certainly cannot account for how or why readers used a collection of books, but it can evoke readers, in a sense, by documenting what they could, and many of them presumably did, read. While knowing which books a community did and did not have access to through their local library cannot provide a thorough understanding of how individual readers interpreted and used texts, it can help us understand what I am calling 'common knowledge', by which I mean both the books held in common by the members of a social library and thus readily accessible to a specific group of people, and the books held in common across libraries and thus capable of helping distant citizens see themselves as part of a whole. It can also perhaps suggest what that 'whole' was: local, national, transnational or some combination.

In this study, books, individually and collectively, represent a body of knowledge. Of course, knowledge recorded in books is not a fixed or finite thing.

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17 Cynthia Comer, 'List Checking as a Method for Evaluating Library Collections', *Collection Building*, 3.3 (1981), pp. 26–34; Larry Hardesty and Collette Mak, 'Searching for the Holy Grail: A Core Collection for Undergraduate Libraries', *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 19.6 (January 1994), pp. 362–71; and Sharon L. Baker and F. Wilfrid Lancaster, *The Measurement and Evaluation of Library Services*, 2nd ed. (Arlington, VA: Information Resources Press, 1991), pp. 42–47.

An author produces written expression and it is published as a book, an object that can be disseminated. A collection of books can be understood as the aggregation of many authors' written expression into a body of knowledge. The extent to which such a body fosters common knowledge in a community depends in part on how many in the community read everything in the collection. The virtual reading community is that group of people, near and far, who have read all those books (or had them read to them) and thus possess all that content ('knowledge') in common. But, as countless print culture theorists and historians have said, text is only meaningful when read and its meaningfulness shifts with each reader. We might want to go so far as to say that there is no such thing as common knowledge, since everyone may read and interpret the collection and each item in it idiosyncratically.<sup>18</sup> 'Common knowledge' is therefore a flawed term and a flawed concept. For my purposes, though, I want to use 'common knowledge' to stand for a collection of information distributed in books held in particular locations and accessible to identifiable groups of individuals. The category necessarily conjures its own opposite, uncommon knowledge, the idea that books uniquely held by only one library in a state or region represent information or entertainment possessed by one group but not its neighbours. Any attempt at arriving at common knowledge in and across locales and through book reading necessarily depends on books being available. Reading aside, the base level to begin from is: which books were available and to which communities? A list of books owned by a specific library company cannot answer that question entirely, but since subscription libraries usually offered more books to more people than privately owned libraries could or did, they are an important component of a community's print-culture and, by extension, print-capitalism profile.

The pamphlets containing the library rules and catalogues considered here depict a lack of standardisation, which supports Loughran's account of scattered and unreliable information technologies. Of the three Pennsylvania libraries, Carlisle and Norristown published a catalogue classified by subject. Of the three Massachusetts libraries, only Springfield did. And the categories used did not correspond exactly. The Norristown catalogue lists 148 titles in nine categories; Springfield's catalogue organises 146 titles into five; and both included the catch-all category "miscellanies". Classification of such small collections may not have been worth the trouble; Norristown's agriculture and gardening category listed only three books and its physick and farriery category only one.

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18 Jonathan Rose grapples brilliantly with individual and sometimes counterintuitive interpretations of classic and popular works in his *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).

TABLE 6.1    *Carlisle Library Company books by category.*

Category	No. of items
History	27
Voyages	3
Travels	13
Biography	4
Husbandry	6
Miscellaneous	61
Total	114

Larger collections, such as that in Newburyport with about fifty more titles, did not bother with subject classification, listing works in alphabetical order by author’s last name or first substantive word of the title (depending on how the book entry was crafted) instead. Library cataloguing and classification standards would be developed decades after these institutions were founded in a process fraught with differing opinions.<sup>19</sup>

Although each library catalogue had as its main purpose the listing of items available for borrowing by company shareholders or subscribers, the ways in which the lists were presented varied considerably. *Rules of the Carlisle Library Company; with a Catalogue of Books Belonging Thereto* commenced with eight pages that listed the names of the individuals who drew up the rules; an announcement regarding the time and place for the annual meetings and the opening hours of the library; the statement of the librarian’s salary; requirements specifying that members were to pay eight dollars to join and one dollar and twenty-five cents annually to maintain membership; and the assertion that “any inhabitant of Cumberland county, who shall be approved of by the Directors for the time being, may hereafter become a Member of the company”.<sup>20</sup> Each shareholder was allowed to borrow one book at a time, the only exception being multi-volume sets, in which case the shareholder could take up to four volumes of the set. The catalogue of books that follows lists items in categories in no particular order, as shown in Table 6.1, and the large proportion of books in the miscellaneous category attests to the difficulties of classification.

19    Katherine M. Wisser, ‘The Organization of Knowledge and Bibliographic Classification in Nineteenth-Century America’, unpublished PhD thesis, University of North Carolina, 2009.  
20    *Rules of the Carlisle Library Company*, pp. 3–4.

TABLE 6.2 *Springfield Library Company books by category and size.*

	Divinity and Ethics	History, Biography, Travels and Voyages	Miscellanies	Poetry	Novels	Total
Quartos	0	0	2	0	0	2
Octavos	27	24	19	3	0	73
Duodecimos	15	12	22	16	10	75
Total	42	36	43	19	10	150

Each item is listed in a cryptic manner – “Delolme on the English constitution”, “Brydone’s tour” – suggesting that the cataloguer assumed that the small group constituting the library’s community would know the author and work referred to in the listing. Perhaps the library acquired only those books that its members had heard discussed and thought they should read, not only for content but for identification with a particular group of readers on both sides of the Atlantic. All of the catalogues under consideration here use such abbreviated entries. Even booksellers, who might be motivated to provide full author names and titles as a selling strategy, resorted to such cryptic entries in their catalogues. For example, Isaiah Thomas’s 1803 catalogue of books for sale listed “De Lolme on the English Constitution” and “Brydone’s Tour through Sicily and Malta”, in the latter entry providing more than the Carlisle catalogue’s “Brydone’s tour”. Such entries left out most of the bibliographic information that late nineteenth-century standards would subsequently require to identify unique editions with precision for a mass audience of more diverse readers, including such elements as the author’s full name, the work’s full title, the publisher’s name and location, and the year of publication.<sup>21</sup>

In contrast, the Springfield catalogue lists items within subject categories and then by size, as shown in Table 6.2. A short two paragraphs state the “Library Regulations” on the last page. The regulations allowed each member to borrow books by size. With the purchase of one share, a member could take “One Quarto and Two Octavos, or One Quarto and Four Duodecimos, or Three Octavos”, the differing treatment apparently based on the greater cost of buying, and, if necessary, replacing, larger books. While indicating physical

21 Isaiah Thomas, *Catalogue of English, Scotch, Irish and American Books for Sale at the Worcester Bookstore* (Worcester, MA: Thomas, 1801).

size of books in the catalogue may at first glance seem less important than providing twenty-first-century-style metadata definitively indicating the exact work and edition, in the case of Springfield the catalogue entry reinforced the rule.<sup>22</sup>

Although many of the organisational operations are similar, each printed pamphlet suggests the different personalities, if I can use that term, of the different libraries. The Carlisle pamphlet was printed locally by George Kline, who in 1785 had established the *Carlisle Gazette*, interior Pennsylvania's first newspaper.<sup>23</sup> Its thirteen rules are on the first eight pages, followed by seven pages listing books by category. Norristown's pamphlet was printed in nearby Philadelphia, by John Ormrod, and includes five articles of incorporation on the first two pages, followed by a list of fifty-nine subscribers, and then eighteen bylaws on the next four pages. Books are listed on the next eleven pages with a number starting each entry; the number identified the book in the borrowing records, an efficiency that eliminated having to write the whole title every time the book was borrowed. The books are not listed in sequential numerical order in the catalogue, but in subject categories. Fredericktown's pamphlet was printed twenty miles away in the county seat of Washington by John Colerick, one of the publishers of the *Western Telegraph* and *Washington Advertiser*. Fredericktown opened with five rules on two pages followed by four pages of book listings, with author title in the left column and number of volumes in the right. Carlisle and Norristown thought categories helpful, Norristown revelled in bureaucratic articles and regulations, and little Fredericktown thought it necessary to list every volume, always amounting to a greater sum than the number of titles alone. All of the libraries held annual meetings where attending members elected the next year's board of directors, who had responsibilities that included acquiring books and periodicals. Norristown allowed longer lending periods for members living on the wilder southwest side of the Schuylkill River than on the northeast side. Residents living within five miles of the libraries in Norristown and in Carlisle had shorter borrowing periods than farther-flung fellow members, an acknowledgement of continuing transportation difficulties as settlement expanded faster than roads could be improved and bridges installed.

Aside from the impression each pamphlet gave of its library, the collections themselves reflect substantive differences. A few well-known and influential titles are held by all the libraries, but overall their collections reinforce local

<sup>22</sup> *Catalogue of Books Belonging to the Springfield Library Company*, p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> Judith Ridner, *A Town In-Between. Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and the Early Mid-Atlantic Interior* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), p. 160.



TABLE 6.3 *Count and percentage of book titles held by six social libraries.*

Library	Number of titles held	Percentage of titles held, including duplicates (n=880)	Percentage of titles held, excluding duplicates (n=560)
Carlisle, PA	114	13	20
Fredericktown, PA	127	15	23
Norristown, PA	152	17	21
Dorchester, MA	134	15	24
Newburyport, MA	203	23	36
Springfield, MA	150	17	20
Total	880	100	144

distinctiveness, borne out by the measures of overlap across libraries. Table 6.3 shows the number and percentage of book titles held by the libraries. About two-thirds of the libraries' collective holdings (377 out of 560) were unique titles owned by only one of them.<sup>24</sup>

As Table 6.4 shows, the unique holdings of each library ranged from a low of thirty-nine percent in Newburyport (with the largest collection) to a high of fifty-one percent in Norristown. In Fredericktown, library subscribers had access to sixty-two titles not available in the other five towns, at least not at their social library, while in Newburyport eighty titles were not held in Fredericktown nor in the other four libraries. Of the 560 total titles, 377 (sixty-seven percent) were held by a single library and ninety-eight (seventeen percent) were held by two (Table 6.5). The fact that eighty-five percent of the overall collection was held by one or at most two libraries suggests a decided lack of common knowledge (again, using books as proxies for knowledge) across New England and mid-Atlantic communities in the early republic.

<sup>24</sup> The first column of percentages is calculated on the number of all titles including duplicate counts representing overlap; the total is the sum of each library's total holdings. The second column of percentages is calculated on the number of titles excluding the overlapping duplicates. The total number of unique titles across the six libraries is 560, with 880 total holdings among the six libraries. Since the total count of unique titles held by all six libraries is 560, the percentages in the last column add to 144. In other words, there are 560 titles and 880 holdings of those books, so 320 of the books were listed as held by at least two libraries.

TABLE 6.4 *Books held and proportion unique to each of six libraries, ranked by size of collection.*

Library	Number of titles held	Number of unique titles held	% of unique titles within library's collection	% of unique titles held by all six libraries
Carlisle	114	49	43	13
Fredericktown	127	62	49	16
Dorchester	134	57	44	15
Springfield	150	62	41	16
Norristown	152	67	51	20
Newburyport	203	80	39	20
Total	880	377		100

TABLE 6.5 *Overlap of six library company collections, n=560.*

Libraries owning	Number of items (%)
1	377 (67)
2	98 (17)
3	50 (9)
4	20 (4)
5	11 (2)
6	4 (7)

The three Massachusetts and three Pennsylvania libraries owned only four titles in common:

Franklin, *Works, Containing an Account of his Life, Written by Himself  
Together with Essays Humorous, Moral and Literary*  
Knox, *Essays, Moral and Literary*  
Smith, *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*  
Robertson, *History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles the Fifth*

Smith and Robertson were intellectuals central to the Scottish Enlightenment. Their work was widely disseminated, found in even the smallest library

collections in England, as David Allan has documented.<sup>25</sup> So it is no surprise that all six libraries included Smith's *Wealth of Nations* and Robertson's *Charles the Fifth*. Smith's *Wealth of Nations* "was nowhere more enthusiastically received than in the new United States of America", where its success was at least partly based on the fact that it "could be read in profoundly different ways".<sup>26</sup> It is also no surprise that the culminating work of a home-grown intellectual, Franklin, who had died in 1790, would be included in this four-title core. While Franklin's book, in the context of the larger library collections, can be considered a representative of American – or even Pennsylvanian – distinctiveness, Franklin himself was simultaneously the quintessential American and the worldly scientist and diplomat. From Franklin came the push for better information infrastructure in the American colonies, in the form of an organised postal service that would address the kinds of calamities Loughran detailed. Franklin also published a newspaper, the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, and thus produced and distributed a form of print that Anderson saw as instrumental to nation formation. And he created the Library Company of Philadelphia, the subscription model that subsequent libraries followed. But he spent long years across the Atlantic, living in London and Paris and travelling in Europe, engaged in the sharing of scientific information and the negotiations for official support for American independence. He embodied the complexity of local, regional and transnational knowledge that characterised the eighteenth century.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to the four core titles that all six libraries held, another eleven titles were owned by five of the libraries (non-owning library in parentheses):

Brydone, *Tour through Sicily and Malta* (Fredericktown, PA)

Ferguson, *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (Fredericktown, PA)

Gibbon, *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*  
(Dorchester, MA)

Goldsmith, *History of the Earth and Animated Nature* (Newburyport, MA)

Goldsmith, *Vicar of Wakefield* (Carlisle, PA)

Montesquieu, *Spirit of Laws* (Springfield, MA)

25 David Allan, *A Nation of Readers: The Lending Library in Georgian England* (London: British Library, 2008), pp. 50–51.

26 Peter S. Onuf, 'Adam Smith and the Crisis of the American Union', in Manning and Cogliano (eds.), *The Atlantic Enlightenment*, pp. 149–50.

27 Gordon S. Wood, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Penguin, 2004); Ralph Frasca, *Benjamin Franklin's Printing Network* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2006).

Moore, *Journal During a Residence in France, from the Beginning of August, to the Middle of December, 1792, to Which is Added an Account of the Most Remarkable Events that Happened at Paris, from That Time to the Death of the Late King of France* (Carlisle, PA)

Moore, *Travels, Containing a View of Society and Manners in France, Switzerland, Germany and Italy, with Anecdotes Relating to Some Eminent Characters* (Fredericktown, PA)

Pope, *Works* (Carlisle, PA)

Robertson, *History of America* (Norristown, PA)

Thomson, *Seasons, Being a Description of Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter, Accordingly as Those Seasons Affect the Various Parts of Nature* (Carlisle, PA)

Several reasons could be behind a library's failure to acquire a title, and the small number of libraries discussed here cannot point to a definitive pattern of deliberate selection or elimination. It is possible that the non-holding library acquired the title shortly after the catalogue went to press, which may well be the case with Norristown.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, it is striking that Norristown did not list Robertson's *History of America* among its holdings. It was a classic text widely circulated in the years after the American Revolution. Perhaps not as well known today as his contemporaries Gibbon and Hume, William Robertson was an author of Enlightenment-era books that "were widely read and enjoyed for the clarity and grace of their style".<sup>29</sup> Robertson's books travelled from printers and booksellers in London to various locations in the American republic, including library company collections. The first edition of *History of America*, in two volumes, was printed in 1777 in London for the booksellers William Strahan and Thomas Cadell in the British metropole and John Balfour in Edinburgh, where Robertson served as minister to an important Church of Scotland congregation and as principal of the University of Edinburgh. In 1788, a three-volume definitive edition with Robertson's additions and corrections was printed in London for Strahan. It was not until after Robertson's death in 1793 that American presses began publishing editions of the work, including a 1798 edition printed by Robert Wilson in New York and a long excerpt focused on Virginia and New England printed and sold in 1799 by James Humphreys

28 No subsequent catalogue is provided in *Early American Imprints, Series II: Shaw-Shoemaker, 1801-1819*, Readex, a division of NewsBank.

29 Stewart J. Brown (ed.), *William Robertson and the Expansion of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 1.

in Philadelphia.<sup>30</sup> Multiple copies of editions of *History of America* translated into French are documented in the archives of the Swiss publisher, Société Typographique de Neuchâtel. *Histoire de l'Amérique* went to sixty-five European destinations, where booksellers in Lausanne, Madrid, Lisbon, Copenhagen, Moscow and other large and small cities aided its distribution.<sup>31</sup>

Norristown serves as an example of how a collection overlap study can lead to research questions that open up a range of book history topics, from the existence and activities of local printing offices to the function of international trade routes in support of book distribution. Beyond such large topics, however, is the small but no less significant question of local taste. In the case of Norristown, with a relatively small collection reflecting a small budget, an emphasis on fiction may have crowded out standard fare such as Robertson's *History of America*. The Norristown library catalogue lists 152 titles, of which thirty-two (twenty-one percent) are novels, the most substantial collection of the six libraries. The largest overall collection of the six, 203 titles held by Newburyport, included the next largest number of novels, fourteen (seven percent). Springfield held twelve novels; Fredericktown, nine; Dorchester, three.

Of the six libraries only Carlisle's was devoid of novels. Since the presence of novels can be understood as an indicator that women were reading from the library collection, the gap in Carlisle might suggest that women were not allowed to use the library. Evidence from the library's pamphlet indicates they were allowed, however, just as in Wigtown. The rules specify that "No member shall lend out of his own dwelling, any Book belonging to the Company, to any person who is not a Member".<sup>32</sup> The phrase "out of his own dwelling" implies that letting others in a household, including wives and daughters, read library books was acceptable. Another section of the rules states that anyone who "refuseth to pay his or her annual payment" could be barred from the library, clearly signalling the participation of women, presumably, as in Wigtown, widows able to conduct their own business affairs. Whereas in some locales the presence of women readers created a demand for fiction willingly supplied by subscription libraries or their for-profit counterparts, the circulating libraries, in Carlisle, the reaction was the opposite. Women, and in fact all, readers were

30 R.A. Humphreys, *William Robertson and his History of America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954).

31 Robert Darnton, 'A Literary Tour de France', <http://www.robertdarnton.org/literarytour>; Simon Burrows and Mark Curran, 'The French Book Trade in Enlightenment Europe Database, 1769–1794' (<http://fbtee.uws.edu.au/stn/interface/>); the *Histoire de l'Amérique* page is at <http://fbtee.uws.edu.au/stn/interface/browse.php?t=author&id=au0000767&id1=spbk0004150>.

32 *Rules of the Carlisle Library Company*, p. 7.

to be kept away from fiction. The lack of novels and romances can be explained by the ideological bent of the committee of five men, named in the pamphlet, who led the library effort by creating its rules and regulations. One was “Doctor Nisbet”, apparently Charles Nisbet, a Presbyterian minister who had emigrated from Scotland to become president of the newly established Dickinson College in 1785. A conservative “champion of strict Calvinist theology”, Nisbet had supported the American Revolution but not the French one. Nisbet can be understood as part of the “Protestant Enlightenment” exemplified by his counterpart at the College of New Jersey (now Princeton), the Scottish Presbyterian immigrant, John Witherspoon.<sup>33</sup> Both Witherspoon and Nisbet conformed to the Scottish Common Sense school of philosophy, with its “implicit suspicion of the undisciplined imagination”.<sup>34</sup> Another of the library’s founding members was “Doctor Davidson”, apparently the Revd Robert Davidson, who left his post as assistant minister at the First Church of Philadelphia to take the helm of Carlisle’s First Presbyterian Church and to teach belle lettres, geography and history at Dickinson College.<sup>35</sup> In these two founders, Carlisle shared with Wigtown a strong link to Scottish Presbyterianism, but unlike Carlisle, the Wigtown collection included novels.<sup>36</sup> Within Pennsylvania, the deep differences between the Norristown and Carlisle libraries demonstrate that collections could be quite distinctive from other collections in the same state. In some ways, Carlisle’s experience aligned with Wigtown’s; both had Scottish Presbyterian ministers as founders and both were situated in the hinterlands. Norristown’s location twenty miles from Philadelphia afforded a more cosmopolitan acceptance of fiction, perhaps, than did Carlisle’s on the frontier one hundred miles farther west. In its members’ interest in novels, however, Norristown and Wigtown were more closely allied with each other than either of them were with Carlisle.

The following two lists suggest some basic differences across the two states. The three Pennsylvania libraries held eleven titles in common, with Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson the only American authors:

Franklin, *Works, Containing an Account of his Life, Written by Himself  
Together with Essays Humorous, Moral and Literary*

- 
- 33 Daniel W. Howe, ‘John Witherspoon and the Transatlantic Enlightenment’, in Manning and Cogliano (eds.), *The Atlantic Enlightenment*, pp. 61–79.
  - 34 Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America*, expanded edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 114–15.
  - 35 Ridner, *Town In-Between*, p. 158.
  - 36 Towsey, ‘First Steps in Associational Reading’, p. 467.

Gibbon, *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*  
 Goldsmith, *History of the Earth and Animated Nature*  
 Hume, *History of England, from the Invasion of Julius Caesar, to the Revolution in the Year 1688*  
 Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*  
 Junius, *Letters*  
 Knox, *Essays*  
 Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*  
 Plutarch, *Lives, with Notes Critical and Historical, and a New Life of Plutarch*  
 Robertson, *History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles the Fifth*  
 Smith, *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*

The three Massachusetts libraries held twenty-three titles in common:

Blair, *Sermons*  
 Brydone, *Tour through Sicily and Malta*  
 Ferguson, *Essay on the History of Civil Society*  
 Fordyce, *Addresses to Young Men*  
 Fordyce, *Sermons to Young Women*  
 Franklin, *Works, Containing an Account of his Life, Written by Himself Together with Essays Humorous, Moral and Literary*  
 Goldsmith, *Vicar of Wakefield*  
 Hunter, *Sacred Biography*  
 Mason, *Self-Knowledge*  
 Moore, *Travels, Containing a View of Society and Manners in France, Switzerland, Germany and Italy, with Anecdotes Relating to Some Eminent Characters*  
 Moore, *Journal During a Residence in France, from the Beginning of August to the Middle of December 1792, to Which is Added an Account of the Most Remarkable Events that Happened at Paris from that Time to the Death of the Late King of France*  
 Newton, *Prophecies*  
 Paley, *Philosophy*  
 Pope, *Works*  
 Ramsay, *History of the American Revolution*  
 Richardson, *Charles Grandison*  
 Robertson, *History of America*  
 Robertson, *History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles the Fifth*  
 Smith, *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*  
 Smith (William), *History of New York*

Sterne, *Sentimental Journey*

Thomson, *Seasons, being a Description of Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter, Accordingly as those Seasons Affect the Various Parts of Nature*

Walker, *Sermons*

Rather than going into a detailed discussion of the differences in the two regions' collective holdings, it may be sufficient at this point to acknowledge that the preceding tables of data and lists of works provide helpful depictions for representing overlap across the selected library collections. For textual data such as book titles, however, an additional kind of visualisation, the word cloud, may be of use, particularly for eliciting the topics, rather than the works, represented in collections. The word cloud in Figure 6.1 depicts the most common title keywords in the Pennsylvania libraries' collections, along with the number of occurrences of the words. Clearly, the topic that most interested small-town mid-Atlantic gentlemen was history, with almost twice as many occurrences of the title words "history" and "historical" than the next category, adventures and travels. But that was hardly a distinguishing characteristic since many eighteenth-century libraries circulated disproportionately high numbers of historical works.<sup>37</sup> While collections may not have overlapped greatly in terms of the exact works held, there was great overlap of interest in the topic itself.<sup>38</sup> In general, titles focused on and emanated from the European side of the Atlantic.

Because Norristown proved to be an outlier in its disproportionately large collection of novels, it is useful to consider the word cloud drawn from the titles in its collection. Figure 6.2 shows that the topics covered in Norristown mirrored those of its fellow Pennsylvania libraries.

In contrast, the three Massachusetts libraries differed from the Pennsylvania libraries, as seen in Figure 6.3. While history accounted for about twenty-six percent of the Pennsylvania collection it accounted for only eighteen percent of the Massachusetts collection. In Massachusetts, sermons were more important, but within the state not by much, accounting for about ten percent of the three libraries' collective holdings. In Pennsylvania, only one title included the keyword 'sermons', a collection by the popular Edinburgh divine Hugh Blair, held by Fredericktown.

The largest collection, at Newburyport, diverged from the overall collection of the three Massachusetts libraries. As shown in Figure 6.4, sermons were

37 Towsey, 'First Steps in Associational Reading', p. 465.

38 I am grateful to Kyle Roberts for this insight.





FIGURE 6.1 Word cloud of most frequently used keywords in titles of books held by three Pennsylvania libraries.







TABLE 6.6 *Massachusetts and Pennsylvania library holdings of 242 titles in six categories.*

Category	Massachusetts	Pennsylvania	Holdings
Agriculture and gardening; Husbandry; Physick and farriery	0	9	9
Biography; History; History, biography, geography, voyages and travels; History, biography, travels and voyages; Travels; Voyages	79	81	98
Divinity and ethics; Moral philosophy, religion and elocution	44	12	50
Natural Philosophy, Metaphysics, Laws and Politics	9	22	22
Novels; Novels and romances	21	33	39
Poetry; Poetry and dramatic works	16	12	24

important, but not more so than history. Newburyport was a seaport, about fifty miles north of Boston. Springfield was about 100 miles west of Boston – inland, but not on the frontier like Carlisle, some 300 miles southwest. Newburyport's larger book collection and position on the Atlantic coast seem to have supported a greater interest in history over religion, once more suggesting the vibrancy of transnational trade and the relative ease of receiving books near their point of arrival as opposed to farther inland.

Title keywords are helpful for visualising the topics included in library collections, but keywords are not always descriptive of a work's content. Library catalogues listing books in broad subject and genre categories offer another way of appraising collections. In the case of the six libraries explored here, only some of the catalogues listed books by subject and genre. Of the 560 titles in the six collections, 242 were categorised by subject or genre.<sup>39</sup> Consequently, the data shown in Table 6.6 do not provide a complete picture of holdings. Used in conjunction with the keyword data, though, some patterns emerge.

39 This count does not include books in the 'miscellanies' and 'miscellaneous' categories. Because libraries used different category labels, I have consolidated the like categories.

Again, history and travels are more important to the Pennsylvania library subscribers than to their Massachusetts counterparts. The greatest number of titles overall, ninety-eight, are in this category, with Pennsylvania libraries owning seventy-nine of those titles compared to Massachusetts libraries' fifty-five. Without the relatively large collection at Newburyport, the total for Massachusetts would be smaller still. The data showing that Massachusetts libraries collected more books in the category of divinity, ethics and religion reinforces the conclusion that Massachusetts subscribers were more willing to read 'sermons' than their fellow citizens in the mid-Atlantic. Of forty-eight total titles in this category, Massachusetts libraries owned forty-four, reflecting its narrower religious heritage as well as Pennsylvania's religious and ethnic diversity. Similarly, Pennsylvania's nine titles related to agriculture reflect the more rural interests of Carlisle, with six of the titles, and Norristown with four, including one also in the Carlisle library. Despite Carlisle's complete lack of novels, Pennsylvania held three-quarters of the total number of novels, compared to Massachusetts libraries' holding of about half the titles, mainly because of Norristown's apparent addiction to fiction.

In the 1790s, several developments converged: the transition from a loose confederation of states to a fledgling nation still connected to its British legacy through tradition and trade; the growing viability of a domestic printing industry intent on republishing popular English and Scottish titles as well as American works; and improvements in interstate and intrastate transportation systems that helped smooth the flow of goods, including books, no matter which side of the Atlantic produced them. In the midst of these developments, gentlemen on the coast and farther inland established small library companies founded on the principle of sharing, which operated within a larger context of print culture and capitalism. For Benedict Anderson, the products of print-capitalism fostered a sense among individuals that they were surrounded by others like them, whom they may never meet but whose interests and activities indicate they are compatriots. More precisely, it is the ritual of newspaper reading – done at certain times of the day – and the presentation of newspaper stories – covering events happening in different places – that encourage people to imagine themselves part of a much larger whole. For Trish Loughran, the communication and transportation difficulties and delays that interrupted the rituals of reading made it difficult to sustain a national imaginary. The collections available in small subscription libraries played a role in both helping and hindering readers' sense of themselves as engaged in the larger project of nation formation. The ritual of reading jointly owned books differed from the ritual of reading the daily newspaper. Library company regulations regarding fines for late or lost books underscored a central difference between the newspaper, a temporary form of print meant to be used and discarded, and the

book, a more lasting form suitable for multiple uses over time. And while there were certainly rituals involved – the creation of regulations, the periodic meetings of subscribers, the to and fro visits to borrow and return books – they differed considerably from those of the ephemeral newspaper. And the presence of ‘Atlantic Enlightenment’ books complicated the project of nation formation further by connecting local readers to a larger world of information and opinion that transcended national boundaries.

The physical acquisition of books and the intellectual acquisition of the informing and entertaining content within their covers provided access to the minds and imaginations of other people, near and far. The common and uncommon holdings of libraries in the early republic suggest that national and regional imaginaries co-existed in a dynamic comprising local and global knowledge, at least as represented by books and their contents. No matter where they lived, subscribers who paid to create and use a shared collection of books had some interests in common: history, travel and biography. And through their libraries, they had access to some books and authors in common: Franklin’s autobiography, Smith’s economic theory and Robertson’s study of monarchy. But those same collections represented vectors of difference. Of 560 titles in the collective holdings of six libraries, 377 were held by only one of the six. At the local level, Fredericktown, in rural Pennsylvania, had a collection of only 127 titles, and sixty-two of those were unique to the town, not owned by any of the other five libraries in this study. Those sixty-two were shared by the library’s members and their households, reinforcing readers’ identification with other readers in their local non-imaginary town. If one aspect of nation formation is individuals’ sense of the existence of others who, although unacquainted with each other, share a political, economic, and social structure bolstered by the rituals of reading and also by the common stock of knowledge stored in books, then eighteenth-century libraries can be understood as having some role in sustaining the national imaginary. But more compelling is their role in revealing the fantasy of nationhood.

# Reading Sheffield: Sheffield Libraries and Book Clubs, 1771–1850

*Loveday Herridge and Sue Roe\**

The people of Sheffield in whatever contempt they may have been held by supercilious censors, ignorant of their character, were then, as they are now, and as I hope they ever will be, a reading and thinking people.

JAMES MONTGOMERY<sup>1</sup>



This chapter emerges from the work of ‘Reading Sheffield’, a community group with its roots in an oral history project to discover what Sheffield people read during the 1930s and 1940s, and how and why their reading habit was formed. Many interviewees highlighted the importance of public libraries in this process, reflecting on the exotic and solitary pleasures of the city’s Central Library during their childhood and teenage years. At about the time the oldest interviewees were beginning to choose books at the Central Library (opened in 1934), it absorbed the collection of the Literary and Philosophical Society (1822–1932). That collection, in turn, had been augmented by an earlier merger with the Sheffield Subscription Library (1771–1907).<sup>2</sup> As a consequence of these several acquisitions, the project’s twentieth-century readers became tangibly linked to the eighteenth-century members of the Subscription Library, and we

\* We would like to thank Dr Mary Grover, Chair of the Reading Sheffield Project, for her invaluable help and advice, especially on the analysis of the Reading Sheffield interviews.

1 John Holland and James Everett, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of James Montgomery, Including Selections From his Correspondence, Remains in Prose and Verse, and Conversations on Various Subjects* (London: Longman, 1854), i, p. 141.

2 For an outline history, see Sara E. Joynes, ‘The Sheffield Library, 1771–1907’, *Library History*, 2.3 (1971), pp. 91–116. The original title of Sheffield’s subscription library is not known, although from 1791 (at least) to 1818 it mainly referred to itself as the ‘Book Society’. In 1818 the library was renamed the ‘Sheffield Library’, to signal the changes and improvements put in place to forestall the setting up of a rival library, and perhaps to indicate that it was the main library for the elite of Sheffield. Here it will be referred to as the Sheffield Subscription Library.



became interested in finding out how the meaning of libraries to Sheffield's readers had changed over the intervening period. Just as we had discovered what prompted our interviewees to love their library, we wanted to establish what motivated their eighteenth-century predecessors to establish theirs.

The Sheffield Subscription Library turns out to have been one part of a rich and diverse library culture in Sheffield, a northern English industrial town that shipped its products around the Atlantic over the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. No fewer than four voluntary libraries and book societies were established alongside a more uneven landscape of commercial provision operated by enterprising booksellers in the town.<sup>3</sup> Those community libraries – the Sheffield Subscription Library, the Reading and Conversation Society of the Upper Chapel (1793 until at least 1839; referred to hereafter as the Vestry Library), the Book Society (1806–1944) and the Book Club (1821–64) – are the focus of this chapter. We argue that these Sheffield libraries and book societies merit attention as important social institutions that positioned themselves in different ways in a northern industrialised town at a time when events across the Channel and the Atlantic were creating pressures on the town's residents to look ever further both commercially and intellectually. The chapter opens with a detailed analysis of the original Sheffield Subscription Library, examining its social composition and collecting habits in light of rapid industrialisation and urban change, before considering how the library community met the unprecedented political and social challenges thrown up by the revolutionary 1790s. Subsequent community libraries and book societies allowed specific communities of readers to define for themselves an exclusive space within Sheffield's library culture in the early nineteenth century. The chapter will conclude by comparing that lost library culture with the experiences of interviewees in the Reading Sheffield project, drawing out the dramatic changes in readers' outlook that have resulted from the emergence of the Public Library movement through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

### Sheffield 1770–1830: An Industrial Town

Sheffield has been a centre of cutlery production at least since Chaucer wrote of a miller, "A scheffeld thwitel baar he in his hose".<sup>4</sup> The manufacture of cutlery and tools, and of steel for these products, relied on easy access to coal, iron ore,

3 Robinson's Sheffield directory for 1797 lists three circulating libraries and nine booksellers, not discussed in this chapter.

4 "He carried a Sheffield knife in his hose"; 'The Reeve's Tale', *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987; 1988 paperback edition), p. 78.

sandstone for the grinding wheels and water for power, all of which Sheffield had in abundance. The town's industrial prominence increased with the development of a pure form of crucible steel and silver plating in the mid-eighteenth century. The town grew rapidly as an industrial centre over the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as the cutlery trade and tool making diversified, and ancillary industries and the new metal industries took root. By 1830, Sheffield had established itself as "the world's steel making capital", and as "a major European centre for cutlery and edge tool, saw and file manufacture".<sup>5</sup> In the 1850s there were 135 steel-making firms in the Sheffield area.<sup>6</sup>

Atlantic trade, especially with North America, fuelled Sheffield's growth. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the cutlery and edge tool trade supplied the needs of American settlers for axes, saws, chisels, files, scythes and shears. Demand for Sheffield steel increased with the spread of the American population westwards across the continent and the expansion and mechanisation of American agriculture after 1820. Sheffield companies were better able to meet this demand after the opening of the Sheffield Canal in 1819 and the Sheffield-Rotherham Railway in 1838. By 1850, several Sheffield steel magnates had made fortunes in the American trade.<sup>7</sup> Some cutlery firms had agents in American cities, and names like the Washington Works and Philadelphia Works reflected the importance of the American trade.

Economic success brought important demographic and social changes to Sheffield. It led to a growth in population, from 12,000 in 1755 to over 31,000 in 1801 and over 83,000 in 1851.<sup>8</sup> In the mid-eighteenth century the town had a distinctive industrial structure: it was a "workshop city" dominated by the "little mesters", who might possess their own tools and workplace, or rent workspace and power from a merchant.<sup>9</sup> On the whole, these were highly skilled, high wage-earning craftsmen. In the last quarter of the eighteenth century – in the years and decades immediately following the foundation of the Sheffield

5 Geoffrey Tweedale, *Sheffield Steel and America: A Century of Commercial and Technological Interdependence, 1830–1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 2.

6 Karen Evans, Penny Fraser and Ian Taylor, *Tale of Two Cities: Global Change, Local Feeling and Everyday Life in the North of England* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 38.

7 Tweedale, *Sheffield Steel*, p. 5.

8 Sheffield Local Studies Library (hereafter, SLSL), Miscellaneous Papers 2417, David Hey, 'The Population of Sheffield', 1973; William White, *General Directory of the Town, Borough and Parish of Sheffield* (Sheffield, 1856), p. vii.

9 R. Dennis, 'The Social Geography of Towns, 1730–1914', in Robert A. Dodgshon and Robin A Butlin (eds.), *Historical Geography of England and Wales*, 2nd edn. (London: Academic Press, 1990), pp. 429, 439; John Stevenson, *Artisans and Democrats: Sheffield in the French Revolution, 1787–97* (Sheffield: Sheffield History Pamphlets, 1989).

Subscription Library – this relatively cohesive social order was threatened by a number of societal and economic factors, including temporary loss of trade following the American Revolution; dissension over trading practices in the Sheffield Cutlers Company, which regulated the cutlery trade; and expansion of the control of production by some of the larger merchants and manufacturers.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, increasing prosperity and the resultant surplus wealth and leisure at the upper end of the social scale engendered other developments in urban life. “The middle class went about literally creating the urban terrain on which they lived their lives”, argues Alan White.<sup>11</sup> Thus Sheffield’s first speculative housing development was gradually occupied by professional families from 1736–71. This was followed by assembly rooms, a theatre, a new marketplace, a general infirmary, a public newsroom and, by 1823, a music hall. Together with these new physical spaces there is evidence for such habits of association as scientific, literary and convivial societies; newspaper reading; concert going; consumption of fashionable goods; and tea and coffee drinking, which facilitated the “public politeness... that helped establish middling alliances bound by shared interests and understanding”.<sup>12</sup>

There was a strong dissenting tradition in Sheffield, and dissenters played a leading role in the social, cultural and municipal life of the town in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>13</sup> Their interest in religious freedom went hand-in-hand with a regard for political liberty. It is estimated that in 1794 half of Sheffield’s population were dissenters, including many of the town’s wealthiest and most influential merchant and industrialist families. They were prominent among the trustees of the Unitarian Upper Chapel which over the nineteenth century was to provide more mayors, master cutlers and justices of the peace than any other Sheffield church or chapel.<sup>14</sup> Methodism was also strong in Sheffield; Wesley visited the town numerous times and Alexander Kilham, the founder of New Connexion Methodism, set up Scotland Street

10 Julie MacDonald, “‘The Freedom of Election’: The Company of Cutlers in Hallamshire and the Growth of Radicalism in Sheffield 1784–1792”, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Sheffield, 2005.

11 Alan Paul White, “The Formation and Development of Middle Class Urban Culture and Politics: Sheffield 1825–1880”, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leeds, 1990, p. 3.

12 Julie Banham, ‘Politeness in Eighteenth-Century Sheffield: Practices, Accoutrements and Spaces for Sociability’, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Sheffield, 2011.

13 Clyde Binfield, *The History of the City of Sheffield, 1843–1993* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), p. 390.

14 David Hey, ‘The Changing Pattern of Non-Conformity, 1660–1851’, in Sidney Pollard and Colin Holmes (eds.), *Essays in the Economic and Social History of South Yorkshire* (Sheffield: South Yorkshire County Council, 1976), p. 208; Binfield, *History*, p. 393.

Chapel.<sup>15</sup> By the 1851 Religious Census, the total Methodist attendance in Sheffield exceeded that of the Church of England.<sup>16</sup>

### The Sheffield Subscription Library (1771–1907)

Like many subscription libraries, the Sheffield Subscription Library was predominantly dissenting at its foundation.<sup>17</sup> It was conceived “on the plan of one formed a short time before at Leeds”, explained Sheffield-born dissenter and antiquarian Joseph Hunter.<sup>18</sup> The Leeds Library had been founded in 1768 by the rational dissenter and natural philosopher Joseph Priestley, who had connections with Sheffield.<sup>19</sup> He had been an unsuccessful candidate in 1758 for a post as minister at Sheffield’s Upper Chapel, and was a friend of the man who secured a call to the Chapel, John Dickinson.<sup>20</sup> Apparently following his friend Priestley’s lead in promoting libraries as a way of improving minds, Dickinson was a founding member and library president in its first year, and again in 1774, 1777 and 1778.<sup>21</sup>

Ministers played prominent leadership roles in the Subscription Library.<sup>22</sup> The Library Committee, which included the president and librarian, was chosen annually by the whole body of members. There is a discernible shift

15 Hey, ‘Changing Pattern of Non-Conformity’, p. 212.

16 Binfield, *History*, p. 391.

17 Frank Beckwith, ‘The Eighteenth Century Proprietary Library in England’, *Journal of Documentation*, 3.2 (1947), pp. 81–98; Paul Kaufman, ‘The Community Library: A Chapter in English Social History’, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, 57.7 (1967), pp. 1–67; William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 247–260.

18 Joseph Hunter, *Hallamshire: The History and Topography of the Parish of Sheffield* (London: Lackington et al., 1819), p. 125.

19 No contemporary record remains which states the aim of the library. However, Priestley was also instrumental in founding the Birmingham Library in 1781. An advertisement for it, framed by Priestley, stated that the library “will be a treasure of knowledge... [and] may be expected to promote a spirit of liberality and friendship, among all classes of men without distinction”; Kaufman, ‘Community Library’, p. 32.

20 J.E. Manning, *A History of Upper Chapel, Sheffield* (Sheffield: The Independent Press, 1900), p. 75.

21 Thomas Asline Ward, *A Short Account of the Sheffield Library* (Sheffield, 1825), pp. 6–7. Ward was one of Sheffield’s most important civic leaders of the period.

22 The library catalogues provide the names of members, the library rules and lists of books. Catalogues survive from 1792, 1798, 1802, 1816, 1821, 1837, 1846, 1857, 1866 and 1888. Catalogues for the Sheffield subscription library for 1792, 1798 and 1802, referred to in this

from the prominence of dissenting clergy to Anglican clergy over the last quarter of the eighteenth century. From 1771 to 1778 the president's post rotated between three members: two Unitarians (Dickinson and his co-pastor Joseph Evans, Figure 7.1) and one liberal Anglican curate (Edward Goodwin). In contrast, ten different presidents of more varied background were chosen over the next decade, to 1789. Of these, two were Anglican ministers, two were Unitarian ministers, four were medical men (one of whom was a Unitarian) and two were manufacturers. From 1789–1802 – a politically turbulent period in Sheffield, as we shall see – Anglican ministers predominated as presidents, with one serving six times, another twice, and five serving once, together with one Quaker and one gentleman manufacturer. During this period, there had been strong support in Sheffield among non-conformists for the failed application to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts in 1790, and they had also been early and conspicuous supporters of republican ideas in France. Joseph Evans, for example, “would gladly have seen a Revolution at home... In these political sentiments he was by

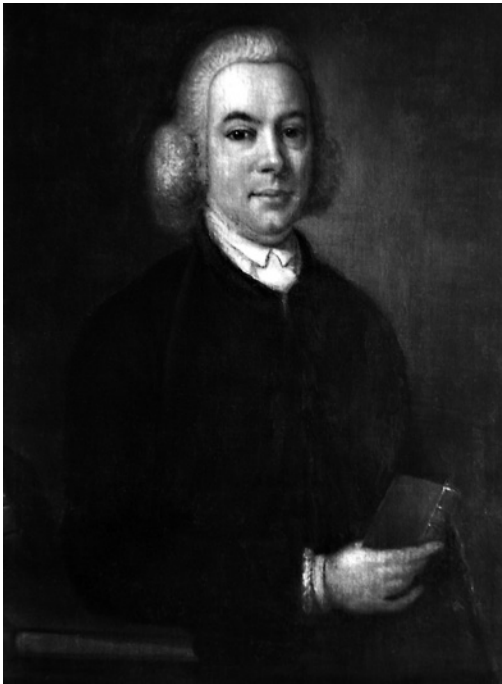


FIGURE 7.1

*The Revd Joseph Evans, Minister at the Upper Chapel, Sheffield, 1758–97, and a founding member of the Sheffield Subscription Library. He holds a book inscribed “Locke”. Painting probably by Nathaniel Tucker, ca. 1777.*

WITH KIND PERMISSION OF  
THE TRUSTEES OF THE UPPER  
CHAPEL, SHEFFIELD.  
PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID PRICE.

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chapter, are bound together under J017.2S in SLSL. For the early years almost no other records survive.

no means peculiar".<sup>23</sup> At this critical time when events in Europe were most disturbing, the election of a president from among Sheffield's Anglican clerics may have been intended to indicate safe, mainstream leadership. Harder to establish is whether the shift from dissenting to Anglican leadership mirrored trends within the Subscription Library's membership or collecting impulses.

Membership of the Sheffield Subscription Library remained dominated by the manufacturing, mercantile and professional elite over its first generation. In 1778 there were fifty-nine members.<sup>24</sup> Of these, seven were clergy (three Unitarians and four Anglican), along with the Vicar of Sheffield's clerk. Manufacturing and merchant families accounted for fifty-six percent of the membership (or thirty-three members). Four were medical men. There was also a druggist, four legal practitioners, a brewer, a printer and bookseller, and the two founders of the first Sheffield Bank. Sixteen members can be identified as non-conformists, or around twenty-seven percent – a substantial group. By 1802, the date of the third extant catalogue, there were 136 members. This indicates only a modest growth over thirty-one years, perhaps because organisational problems had beset the library.<sup>25</sup> While the occupations of fourteen of the members are unknown, merchants and manufacturers accounted for fifty-nine percent of the membership. Fourteen members were ministers, the majority of whom were now Anglican, seven were from medical families, eight from legal families, three from banking families, with bookselling, writing and engineering also represented. Two members had the title of 'Esq'.

Women represented a small, but persistent, percentage of the overall membership across this period. In 1778, seven members (roughly twelve percent) were women: five from manufacturing and merchant families, one related to a dissenting minister and one whose background is unknown. In 1802, thirteen members (ten percent) were women, still a comparatively modest number. Eight of their family names belong to eminent Sheffield cutlers and merchants.

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23 David Price, *Sheffield Troublemakers: Rebels and Radicals in Sheffield History* (Chichester: Phillimore, 2008), p. 5. In Evans's portrait which hangs in the Upper Chapel in Sheffield, he holds a copy of a book inscribed "Locke". K.A. Manley notes that in an essay on reading for young gentlemen Locke maintains that "reading was for the 'improvement of the Understanding', necessary both to increase personal knowledge and deliver that knowledge to others"; Jeremy Bentham has been Banned: Contention and Censorship in Private Subscription Libraries before 1825, *Library and Information History*, 29.3 (September 2013), p. 171.

24 The first list of subscribers' names is for 1778. Ward, *Short Account*, p. 5.

25 Ward, *Short Account*, p. 4. These organisational problems would increase over the next sixteen years. For the very rapid growth in such institutions elsewhere, see David Allan, *A Nation of Readers: The Lending Library in Georgian England* (London: British Library, 2008), p. 13.

Of the remaining five, one may have been related to a 'gentleman', one has the name of an influential surgeon, one was certainly a working writer and another may also have been a writer. Significantly, however, the librarian from 1777 to 1818 was also a woman – Esther Caterer, who inherited the job from her father.<sup>26</sup> The library at this point was situated in Esther's house, where T.A. Ward, the library's historian and its president for many years, acknowledged that she "was allowed to manage her household affairs and the library was neglected". He describes such problems as dirty and tattered books, unregistered loans, popular books secreted for favoured borrowers and a dark and inconvenient library room. In Esther's defence, he notes that she was not paid enough to be a full-time librarian: "For such a small sum no one could attend constantly in the room".<sup>27</sup> A group of members, frustrated by these problems, aimed to set up a new subscription library, but the opportunity for the immediate reform of the old library was seized by the committee at Esther's death, including the appointment of a male librarian who was required to work full-time in offices hired specifically for the library.

The social makeup of the Subscription Library's membership thus remained consistent and stable between 1778 to 1802, regardless of the organisational problems that beset the library from the early years of Esther's long career as librarian. It continued to be dominated by merchants and manufacturers in the cutlery trades and the new industries based on steel, silver, and silver plate, and by professional men who serviced those communities. Twenty-nine family names recur on the membership lists from 1778 to 1802, with thirty-six members from those families listed in 1778, and fifty members from the same families listed in 1802. These families – with others whose names appear in 1802 – were the elite families of Sheffield, prominent in the organisational structures that provided the framework for Sheffield's governance.

At this time Sheffield had no representation in Parliament and no centralised administration. Its governance was largely in the hands of three powerful self-perpetuating bodies: the Town Trustees, who maintained order and the town's infrastructure; the Church Burgesses, a landowning charitable body; and the Company of Cutlers. In 1802, twelve of the thirteen Town Trustees were library members, and nine of the twelve Church Burgesses. The Master Cutler of 1802 (Sheffield's principal citizen) was a library member, as were thirteen other Master Cutlers in the years before and after 1802. In 1802, a further eleven subscribers were members of Master Cutler families. Many subscribers came from families whose members held office in two or all three of these bodies.

26 Ward, *Short Account*, pp. 6–10. Esther Caterer's father, Joseph Saunders, worked with Humphry Wanley at the Harleian Library; Hunter, *Hallamshire*, p. 194.

27 Ward, *Short Account*, pp. 6–7.

Responsibility for law and order in Sheffield lay with the magistrates, the senior of whom was the Vicar of Sheffield, James Wilkinson, a member of the library since at least 1778 and probably until his death in 1805. As one of three Enclosure Commissioners (all of whom were Subscription Library members) his own library had been burned down by rioters incensed by land enclosures in 1791, collateral fallout from an attack most likely aimed at Wilkinson's house, which sometimes served as a courthouse. Ultimate responsibility for Sheffield's law and order lay with the Lord Lieutenant, the Duke of Norfolk (until 1798), whose agent had been a member from at least 1792 until his death in 1801, and was also an Enclosure Commissioner. His son was a member in 1802. Thirteen further subscribers were Commissioners of Police or had family members who held this post.<sup>28</sup>

There was therefore formidable support for the Subscription Library from men of power and influence who, in practice, often increased the reach and strength of their authority through intermarriage. In 1802 admission to the Subscription Library was three and a half guineas on joining, with an annual subscription fee of ten shillings, amounts which signified the exclusivity of the membership.<sup>29</sup> Such privileged and exclusive access was confirmed in the first extant Rules, of 1791, which stated that books could not be lent outside of members' own families, thereby preserving the privileged access of subscribers.<sup>30</sup>

The membership made a strongly cohesive group, and the reputation of the Subscription Library was burnished by their subscription to it. In turn, the act of membership itself expressed cultural leadership of a town that was projected as urbane, educated, leisured and cultured – a counter to Horace Walpole's infamous slur that Sheffield was “one of the foulest towns in England”.<sup>31</sup> Writing

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28 The membership of three prominent men who additionally had links to the book trade may have added a gloss of privileged, bookish knowledge to the library. James Woollen, a member from 1792 to 1802, was the Keeper of the British Circulating Library, one of Sheffield's three commercial circulating libraries at this time. He was the First Worshipful Master of the Royal Brunswick Lodge of Sheffield Freemasons in 1793. Two other members were Sheffield printers and booksellers. These individuals might have derived some commercial benefit in membership of the library. From the library's point of view their membership would have given the committee access to information about the newest publications and the best prices.

29 Ward, *Short Account*, p. 7. Interestingly, Ward advocated “a wise policy of free admission” to encourage new members, while suggesting that the subscription should have been increased to maximise income.

30 Another reason for the rule may have been to help the librarian to keep track of the books. In 1798, 103 books were said to be “lost or missing”.

31 Horace Walpole is quoted in R.B. Wragg, ‘St Paul's Church Sheffield’, *Transactions of the Hunterian Archaeological Society*, 11 (1981), p. 52. Lady Caroline Stuart-Wortley wrote that



some fifty years after the library's foundation, Joseph Hunter and Thomas Asline Ward, both of whom were members in 1802, celebrated its benign influence, presenting it as an agent of civic improvement. Hunter noted that when it was established in 1771 the library was one of the "elegancies and refinements of [the] social life" of the town, drawing together "enlightened and liberal inhabitants" in order to cultivate their own and their children's knowledge.<sup>32</sup> Ward, president of the library in 1809 and 1819–24, noted that in its early years, "its existence must have been of great advantage to the town... there was a mine of intellectual treasure". By 1825, he confidently concluded that "the appearance of the library is now an honour... to the town".<sup>33</sup>

### The Subscription Library as Advocate for Local Culture

The Subscription Library promoted, supported and nurtured local cultural life in various ways. In the first place, it helped generate individual support for local letters. The membership list for 1802 contains the family names of patrons of four books written by local authors. For example, Susanna Pearson attracted many subscribers from among members of the library for her book of poems (1790), as did Augusta Ann Hirst, niece of an eminent Sheffield silver-plater Henry Tudor, for her novel *Helen, or Domestic Occurrences* (1807), and Priscilla Haslehurst, a Sheffield confectioner, for her *Family Friend, or the Housekeeper's Instructor* (1802). At least 170 people having Subscription Library members' family names appear on these publications' subscription lists, many of those named subscribing to multiple books. This suggests a core group of families who took pride in their local culture, used their surplus wealth to support Sheffield's literary endeavours, and followed the manners of polite society in doing so. Significantly, the Subscription Library itself was a subscriber to Joseph Hunter's book *Hallamshire* in 1819, an important work of local history

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she had never before visited such a "stinking, dirty and savage place"; Sheffield Archives [hereafter, SA], Wharnccliffe Muniments, Wh M/506–540, Caroline Stuart-Wortley, Letter, 1801.

32 Hunter, *Hallamshire*, pp. 125, 129. In his 1819 references to the library, the adult Hunter recalls it as a means to self-improvement, but perhaps forgets the sheer pleasure he seemed to have found there as a boy. He had been allowed to borrow books, presumably because his guardian Joseph Evans was a long term member; see British Library, Add MSS 24,879, 'The Journal of Joseph Hunter', 1797 to 1799; Add MSS 24,880, 'Fragment of a Journal of Joseph Hunter', April-May 1800. Steven Colclough discusses Hunter's youthful reading in 'Procuring Books and Consuming Texts: The Reading Experience of a Sheffield Apprentice, 1798', *Book History*, 3 (2000), p. 39.

33 Ward, *Short Account*, pp. 4, 11.

and antiquarianism by one of the library's most famous sons. Hunter first borrowed books from the library at the age of fourteen before he was apprenticed to a cutler. He followed his own voracious reading interests under the auspices of his adoptive father Joseph Evans's membership, benefiting from the librarian Esther Caterer's indulgence of him.<sup>34</sup> He left Sheffield to become a Unitarian minister in Bath and ultimately Assistant Keeper of Public Records in London.

Additionally, a small number of members in 1802 were writers in their own right, suggesting that the library had by then become something of a fulcrum for local literary genius. Silversmith and social reformer Samuel Roberts published a life of Mary Queen of Scots, some verse and many campaign pieces, including *Tales of the Poor, or Infant Suffering* (1813), printed by fellow library member James Montgomery "for the benefit of the Society for the Bettering of the Condition of the Poor in Sheffield". Montgomery himself was the editor of Sheffield's radical newspaper, the *Iris* (1794–1848), as well as being a political satirist and poet, and, later in life, a renowned hymn writer. Eminent mining engineer John Curr published *The Coal Viewer's Companion* (1797), while Jonathon Salt was a botanist who drew and listed Sheffield's wildflower species. The Reverend Edward Goodwin wrote a pamphlet on education and a children's primer. Mrs Sterndale published fiction favourably reviewed by the *Gentleman's Magazine* and "Miss Pearson" may have been Susanna Pearson, a Sheffield poet and novelist.

As well as generating local literature from within the ranks of the library's own membership, Subscription Library members also voted to buy books by authors with Yorkshire associations, a palpable expression of pride in local literary achievement. Among the first twenty volumes purchased were the works of Sheffield-born poet and teacher, James Cawthorne; *Armine and Elvira* by Edmund Cartwright, a Doncaster minister, poet and inventor; and *The English Garden* by William Mason, poet and gardener, who lived near Rotherham.

Subscription Library members also belonged to other clubs, societies and groups that played a significant part in Sheffield's cultural life. For example, fourteen were members of the Monthly Club (begun 1783), an elite dining and conversation club.<sup>35</sup> Eight members attended a course of twelve lectures on Chemistry given in Sheffield by the dissenting minister Dr Thomas Warwick in 1800.<sup>36</sup> Seven were also members of (or related to members of) the Society for

34 'Journal of Joseph Hunter', 1797–1800.

35 White, 'Formation and Development', pp. 24–27.

36 Ian Inkster, 'Culture, Institutions and Urbanity – the Itinerant Science Lecturer in Sheffield, 1790–1815', in Sidney Pollard and Colin Holmes (eds.), *Essays in the Economic and Social History of South Yorkshire* (Sheffield: South Yorkshire County Council, 1976), p. 218.

the Promotion of Useful Knowledge (founded in 1804). Seven were committee members of the Sheffield Newsroom, probably set up in 1809.<sup>37</sup> Twelve were members or relatives of members belonging to the Pitt Club (founded in 1810), a dining club which annually celebrated Prime Minister Pitt's birthday.<sup>38</sup> Those who belonged to one or more of Sheffield's elite cultural associations often belonged to the Subscription Library as well.

### The Subscription Library under Political Strain, 1789–1802

Sheffield already had a reputation for radicalism before the turbulent 1790s, and there is circumstantial evidence that the library played some role in allowing the town's elite families to bridge political divisions. Sheffield had a skilled and increasingly organised workforce, many of whom rioted against land enclosures, high taxes and high food prices in 1791. The Sheffield Society for Constitutional Information (SSCI), founded by a group of "five or six mechanics" in 1791, quickly gathered support for radical political reforms.<sup>39</sup> There were violent clashes during demonstrations in 1792. Sheffield's campaigning newspaper, the *Register*, founded in 1787, was sympathetic to the aims of the revolution in France and promoted Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791–92). The *Register* was read widely in workshops, and also by the manufacturing and merchant classes, who felt that their interests were not represented by the predominantly landowning members of Parliament.<sup>40</sup> Some of these men were sympathetic to the demands of the radicals and were advocates of social reform.

Political tensions in Sheffield grew as the revolution in France progressed. In 1792 John Crome, a Sheffield printer, printed 15,000 copies of a pamphlet edition of volume one of the *Rights of Man* for the SSCI.<sup>41</sup> In 1793, 5,000 people signed an SSCI petition demanding radical parliamentary and electoral reform. In 1794 the editor of the *Register* fled to America to evade government officials. By the end of 1795 repression from the government, backed at a local level, combined with food shortages and economic depression after the war

37 SA, Sheffield Literary and Philosophical Society, SLPS/216, 'Minute Book of a Society for the Promotion of Useful Knowledge, 1804–1805'; Jackson Collection, JC/22/70, 'Rules and Regulations of the Newsroom, 1809.'

38 White, 'Formation and Development', pp. 28–30.

39 Price, *Sheffield Troublemakers*, p. 14.

40 Price, *Sheffield Troublemakers*, p. 11.

41 Price, *Sheffield Troublemakers*, pp. 14, 15. However, William St Clair notes that publisher John Murray states in a letter, October 1792, "The people of Sheffield requested leave to print two thousand copies for themselves, with which request I immediately complied"; *Reading Nation*, p. 624.

with France to silence the SSCL.<sup>42</sup> In 1796, library subscriber James Montgomery, editor of the *Register's* successor, the *Iris*, was imprisoned for sedition for a second time. The threat of a French invasion and further food crises quieted Sheffield almost completely.

During this decade of disquieting events, Subscription Library membership included members on both side of the political divide. Besides the radical publisher Montgomery, library subscribers included Joseph Evans (whose support for a revolution at home we have already noted), T.A. Ward, Thomas Rawson, Samuel Roberts and numerous members of the Shore family, who were all influential supporters of parliamentary and social reform. These men borrowed books alongside members with more conservative opinions, including those who would go on to found the aforementioned Pitt Club.<sup>43</sup> This fine political balancing act is dramatically exemplified by the presence among the 1802 membership of both John Brookfield, the attorney of unusually extreme Tory views who conducted the first prosecution against James Montgomery, and Montgomery himself, only recently released from prison. In 1794 Brookfield had written to the Treasury Solicitor: "We have a set of sad Dogs here, and nothing but a little wholesome correction will, I am afraid, keep them quiet".<sup>44</sup>

A preliminary survey of book choices made by the Subscription Library's membership sheds further light on political dynamics within the library, and suggests that the library adopted a tendency towards conservatism as the decade progressed that was entirely prudent in the political climate.<sup>45</sup> The 1792 catalogue reflects the exhilaration of British radical writers in response to the revolutionary politics of contemporary France. Richard Price's *Discourse on the Love of our Country* (1789), Helen Maria Williams's *Letters from France* (1790), Thomas Christie's *Letters on the Revolution in France and the New Constitution* (1791) and James Mackintosh's *Vindiciae Gallicae* (1791) all offer a sympathetic view of events in France, and sat alongside books discussing liberal ideas more broadly, such as *Internal Evidence* (1784) by John Cartwright, the Unitarian advocate of manhood suffrage and founder of the Society for Constitutional Information, and Mary Wollstonecroft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792).

The Subscription Library had, consciously or not, positioned itself as a cultured, influential, civic minded and tolerant institution, open to new political

42 Stevenson, *Artisans and Democrats*.

43 Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 189–90. They did this as part of a nationwide commemoration to the so-called "Pilot who Weathered the Storm", the Tory Prime Minister who had famously sacrificed himself to resist the revolutionary tide.

44 PRO, TS11/1071/5060, John Brookfield to Treasury Solicitor, 1794.

45 A vote of two thirds of the members determined the choice of books.

ideas, but as the decade progressed in radical Sheffield, where Pitt's "reign of alarm" had a direct impact on daily life,<sup>46</sup> a degree of self-censorship in choosing books might have seemed wise. There were certainly government spies in Sheffield, and printed library catalogues were available for public perusal. Although the two parts of Tom Paine's *Rights of Man* are listed in one surviving version of the 1792 catalogue, he seems to have been expunged entirely from a second version printed in the same year – perhaps as an immediate local response to his conviction *in absentia* for sedition that year.<sup>47</sup> Significantly, both versions of the 1792 catalogue contain Isaac Hunt's *Rights of Englishmen: An Antidote to the Poison of Thomas Paine* (1791), as well as Edmund Burke's famously hostile *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790).

More anecdotal evidence for nervousness on the part of Subscription Library members, or increasing conservatism, is provided by the young Joseph Hunter. On 29 September 1798, Hunter noted in his diary: "Borrowed *Anecdotes of the Founders of the French Revolution*. A second volume has since appeared, they have not voted it into the Library as they have probably found this second volume to be too 'Jacobinical' for them to digest".<sup>48</sup> He noted a month later that "the 2nd number of *Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine* now into Library instead of the *Analytical Review* which they have turned out. It is a most virulent attack on all the friends of liberty or jacobins as they are pleased to stile them".<sup>49</sup> Intriguingly for the fine balance of political views we have already documented in the library in the 1790s, Hunter was wrong. The radical *Analytical Review* was listed in the 1798 catalogue and was still there in 1802, where it was joined by the counter-revolutionary *Beauties of the Anti-Jacobin Paper* (1799), a reprinted anthology of articles from the *Anti-Jacobin Review*.

Further clues for an increasing movement away from radical ideas at the Subscription Library can be traced in the political tendency of novels added to the collection in this period. Matthew Grenby states that "from the early 1790s onwards conservative novels consistently outnumber the radical fictions that had provoked them into being", and the library catalogues give evidence for

46 Kenneth R. Johnston, *Unusual Suspects: Pitt's Reign of Alarm and the Lost Generation of the 1790s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

47 Two catalogues, both of which appear to be for 1792, are bound together in SLSL. They are identical except for one page, where Paine is listed in one but not in the other. It appears that *Rights of Man* was excluded from the subscription library very soon after it was purchased and a new catalogue printed.

48 *Biographical Anecdotes of the Founders of the French Republic, and of Other Eminent Characters, who have Distinguished themselves in the Progress of the Revolution* (London, 1797). Colclough discusses Hunter's comments and the light they throw on the young man's reading; 'Procuring Books', pp. 32–33.

49 'Journal of Joseph Hunter', 1797–1800.

this trend.<sup>50</sup> Grenby provides a useful list of fifty overtly conservative novels published in Britain between 1791 and 1805. The 1792 catalogue lists sixty-five titles in the category of “Novels”, none of which appear among Grenby’s list. In 1798, thirty-three novels were added to the catalogue, of which six are on Grenby’s list. In 1802 a further fourteen were added; of these eight are on Grenby’s list. The Subscription Library’s increasingly conservative choice in novels is consistent with that of the novel reading public in general, of course, and was, in any case, determined by the output of novelists whose productions served “the values and desires of the community”.<sup>51</sup> But the community of readers who formed the Sheffield Subscription Library would certainly seem to have been marching in step with national trends.

### The Reading and Conversation Society of the Upper Chapel (1793- at least 1839)

While the Subscription Library seems to have responded to the turbulent 1790s by moving in a more conservative direction, a number of other library communities emerged which took Sheffield’s library culture in different directions. By 1793 a second Sheffield community library appeared, the Reading and Conversation Society – also known as the Vestry Library – of the Unitarian Upper Chapel. Restricted necessarily to members of the Unitarian congregation, the Vestry Library’s self-pronounced priority was “the religious improvement of its members by reading and conversation”, and although its strict policy of admitting only books of a religious nature was relaxed in 1798, plays and novels were banned from 1799.<sup>52</sup>

Members of the Unitarian Upper Chapel generally enjoyed substance and influence (indeed, three of the first twenty-two subscribers – all of them Unitarian ministers – were already members of the Subscription Library), but the Vestry Library may have set out to attract a different kind of reader from those dissenters who were members of the Subscription Library. Fees for the Vestry Library were low – 2s. 6d. for admission, with 6d. to be paid every six weeks in advance for membership. These were payments set at a level to attract subscribers of quite limited means, cheaper than the fourteen shillings per year or four shillings per quarter set by James Woollen at his Sheffield-based

50 M.O. Grenby, *The Anti-Jacobin Novel: British Conservatism and the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 169.

51 Grenby, *Anti-Jacobin Novel*, p. 170.

52 Documents relating to the Vestry Library are held at SA, UCR 7. Joseph Hunter borrowed from both the Vestry and the Subscription Libraries in 1798–99.

commercial circulating library in 1806, and much less than admission to the Subscription Library.

However, the first membership list of the Vestry Library only tentatively confirms its greater social reach. There were sixteen founder members. The librarian was a substantial brewer, the treasurer was a solicitor, and the committee was composed of a minister, Astley Meanley, newspaper editor Joseph Gales (discussed below), and a William Dod(s)worth, whose occupation is unknown. Of the remaining eleven members, two were cutlers of substance and two were ministers, Joseph Evans, the Upper Chapel's minister, and Benjamin Naylor, his co-pastor, who also part-owned a silver plating firm and briefly part-owned the *Iris* with Montgomery in 1794–95. One was a bookseller, one was a surgeon, and the occupations of the five others are unknown. Among the membership lists, which stretch, with gaps, to 1839, the names of the familiar leading Sheffield Unitarians – manufacturers, ministers and members of the professions – sit next to unknown others, who were perhaps tradesmen and artisans.

The Vestry Library is especially interesting for its apparent connections with radicalism in the tumultuous 1790s, when Sheffield was out of line with the prevailing national spirit of 'Church and King'. One of the founding members of the Vestry Library was also a founding member of the SSC1: Joseph Gales, the Sheffield *Register's* campaigning editor. In fact, he was excluded from the Vestry Library in April 1794, and it is not clear whether this was because his subscription was in arrears, because his radical ideas were unacceptable within the Library, whether for pragmatic reasons or reasons of political ideology, or because, following the suspension of *habeus corpus* in May 1794, he was forced into hiding and fled to America in June. Another member of the SSC1, William Chow (occupation unknown), was also a subscriber to the Vestry Library around 1795, while John Crome, the radical Sheffield printer of a cheap pamphlet edition of Paine's *Rights of Man* in 1792, became a member in 1816. The *Accounts* of the early nineteenth century also show that Joseph Gales's sisters, who retained his print shop, and the reformist James Montgomery, did printing work for the Library.

As for the Vestry Library's books, it has not been possible to examine in detail the rather indistinct list of titles apparently acquired from 1798. However, of the first six legible purchases, Count Rumford's *Essays* (1796), William Belsham's *Memoirs of the Reign of George III* (1795) and John George Zimmerman's *Solitude* (1784–5) were also in the 1798 Subscription Library catalogue. The other three – Belsham's *Answer to Wilberforce* (1798), Joseph Budworth's *A Fortnight's Ramble to the Lakes* (1792), and *Sketch of Modern France by A Lady* (1798) – were not, but books with similar content certainly were present in the Subscription Library's catalogue. The Vestry was therefore a cheaper, and perhaps more radical, Unitarian alternative for those who wanted to join a library, but

the evidence does not suggest that its members pursued a markedly different acquisitions policy. Perhaps the key lies in its original title – ‘Reading and Conversation Society’ – a place where books could be discussed with like-minded readers, although Hunter gives no indication of this in his journal.

### The Sheffield Book Society (1806–1944)

While the Vestry Library emerged to serve the needs of a relatively closed congregational community, a second lay association was formed in Sheffield in December 1806 aiming to promote “the circulation of books”. With a costly admission fee of one guinea, members of the Sheffield Book Society came from much the same families, backgrounds and professions as the Subscription Library, but resolved from the outset that their new society should be kept to a much smaller scale – limited initially to twenty members, and then to thirty from 1817.<sup>53</sup> Although the Book Society’s records give no explicit justification of the need for a new reading association, a number of pragmatic concerns immediately present themselves. The smaller scale of the Book Society would have allowed Sheffield readers to engage more easily in what David Allan calls “the fashion for structured forms of sociability”,<sup>54</sup> imitating an associational format – the book club – which had become increasingly common in the eighteenth century. With committee meetings taking place in the comfort of members’ homes rather than in the potentially more turbulent space of the inn or public house, and the book club format allowing for more regular and convenient delivery of books direct to members, the Book Society had a number of practical advantages over the Subscription Library. As Allan suggests, “a limited membership would allow speedier circulation of texts”, and would better help “well-to-do-readers” to preserve exclusivity in a “polite institution”.<sup>55</sup>

Prestige would certainly seem to explain why an increasingly large proportion of members came from the emerging medical profession, with the initial roster of two medical men in the 1806–7 membership lists rising quickly to between eight and twelve in the years between 1817 and 1850, many of whom worked together at the Infirmary.<sup>56</sup> Sheffield’s rapid population growth around the turn of the century attracted increasing numbers of surgeons, physicians, apothecaries and dispensaries to address health problems caused by

53 SA, M.D. 2221/1, ‘Minute Book of Sheffield Book Society, 1806–1839’.

54 Allan, *Nation of Readers*, p. 13.

55 Ibid., p. 33.

56 SA, M.D. 2221/1; M.D. 2221/2, ‘Minute Book of Sheffield Book Society, 1839–1877’.



overpopulation and industrialisation, and these so-called “Marginal Men” deliberately cultivated respectability through their membership of cultural institutions within the town.<sup>57</sup> Thus the medical men seem to have acted as something of a driving force within the Book Society, attending committee meetings more regularly, often hosting them and proposing titles.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, dedication to the Book Society varied. Some members, such as banker William Shore (grandfather of Florence Nightingale), regularly failed to attend the annual dinner (paying the four shilling fine) or refused to volunteer for committee meetings, or both. Others, such as Samuel Bailey, economist, philosopher and co-founder of the Sheffield Literary and Philosophical Society, and a member from 1817 to 1850, regularly attended committee meetings and played a major role in book selection.<sup>59</sup> Bailey probably had more time and inclination to devote to the Book Society. After a few years in his father’s business, he retired on a comfortable fortune, more able than Shore to pursue his intellectual and associational interests.

The Book Society might also have been established to address the “organisational problems” suffered by the Subscription Library.<sup>60</sup> Competition between Subscription Library members for popular works was made keener by the librarian’s scurrilous practice of hiding them for favoured members, so it may well have been difficult for them to borrow their first choice of books. This may be the reason why, in 1809 and again in 1817, Madame de Stael’s five-volume novel *Corinne in Italy* (1807) was proposed for the Book Society even though this work was already held by the Subscription Library.<sup>61</sup> In fact, of the seventy-six books proposed by members of the Book Society in 1816, thirteen were already in the Subscription Library at a time when nearly half of the membership also subscribed to the Subscription Library.<sup>62</sup> However, nine of these were proposed by men who were not members of the Subscription Library when these books were available, and the others were proposed by Robert Ernest (house surgeon and apothecary at the Sheffield General Infirmary), banker and Town Trustee F.W. Everet and the Revd Peter Wright, Unitarian minister at Stannington, who were never members of the Subscription Library. It is important to bear in mind that at least half the members of

57 Ian Inkster, ‘Marginal Men: Aspects of the Social Role of the Medical Community in Sheffield 1790–1850’, in John Woodward and David Richard (eds.), *Health Care and Popular Medicine in Nineteenth Century England: Essays in the Social History of Medicine* (London: Croom Helm, 1977), pp. 143, 149.

58 SA, M.D. 2221/1 and 2221/2.

59 Ibid.

60 Ward, *Short Account*, pp. 4, 7.

61 SA, M.D. 2221/1; SLSL, J017.2S, Catalogue of the Sheffield Subscription Library (1809).

62 SA, M.D. 2221/1.

the Book Society were not in the Subscription Library lists of 1802 and 1816, so did not have access to its books.

With a number of more conservative titles being acquired by the Subscription Library in the late 1790s and early 1800s, ready access to newly published reformist and even radical works might have become an additional reason for forming the Book Society. Reforming politics can be detected in early choices of the Book Society, especially at a time when "British political culture was dominated by counter revolutionary hysteria".<sup>63</sup> Lucy Hutchinson's posthumously published *Memoirs* (1806) of the life of her husband, Colonel John Hutchinson, dealt with the life of a noted Roundhead commander and regicide from the seventeenth-century Civil Wars. Richard Payne Knight's *Essay on Taste* (1805) took aim at the aesthetic theories of Edmund Burke, doyen of the Counter-Revolution. Dr William Thomson, author of *Military Memoirs* (1804), was a defender of the French Revolution and supporter of Charles James Fox. In *An Historical Apology for the Irish Catholics* (1807), William Parnell argued in favour of Catholic Emancipation even though he was a Protestant. The reviews and journals proposed also had a decidedly radical flavour: the *Political Review* (1807) was edited by Benjamin Flower, a radical journalist; the *Monthly Review* (1807) was set up by Ralph Griffiths, a non-conformist bookseller; and most suggestively of all, William Cobbett's weekly *Political Register* (1808) had shed its early Anti-Jacobinism to become a staunch advocate of political reform, and the newssheet of choice for radical readers across the country.<sup>64</sup>

There is evidence that the Book Society's inclination towards political reform also spilled over into a concern for social issues in 1807, with the inclusion of Patrick Colquhoun's *Treatise on Indigence* (1806), Andrew Bell's *New System of Education for the Poor* (1807) and Joseph Lancaster's *Improvements in Education* (1803). The debate on population triggered by Malthus's *An Essay on the Principles of Population* (1798) – of so much concern to powerful readers in an emerging industrial town like Sheffield – is evident in books refuting his claims by Thomas Jarrold and Robert Ingram. At least four books on cholera were purchased during the 1831 epidemic in Sheffield, while over the years the Book Society also circulated topical books on Bonaparte and the Peninsular War, slavery and abolition, phrenology and parliamentary reform.<sup>65</sup>

Unitarians were prominent in the Book Society (five of the six founding members were Unitarians, including three ministers, and nine of the first

63 Mark Salber Phillips, *Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain, 1740–1820* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 99.

64 SA, M.D. 2221/1.

65 Two Book Society members, Thomas Ward and Samuel Bailey, were unsuccessful candidates in the 1832 election.

twenty-five members), and this no doubt influenced the choice of works, especially in the early years. Not all the Unitarian members served on committees or proposed books, but of the ten most active in putting forward titles in the period 1806–50 at least eight were Unitarian. The Revd Henry Piper proposed works by writers and on issues which could be deemed controversial. In 1808 he favoured a work by John Adolphus who had defended the Cato Street Conspirators. In 1812, he put forward William Paley's *Moral Philosophy* (1785) and, in 1814, Joseph Priestley's *Tracts against Horsley* (not published until 1815). The Revd Nathaniel Phillips proposed works by authors such as Hannah More, Thomas Belsham and William Roscoe. T.A. Ward dominated the choices – he had the most eclectic taste – proposing works by Thomas Malthus and his critics, and by the philosopher William Godwin. His interest in parliamentary reform can be deduced from his choice of such authors as Christopher Wyvill, John Cartwright and Thomas Erskine. Several members revealed a clear interest in theological issues by choosing works such as the Bridgewater Treatises on natural theology, and also works on the Trinitarian Controversy of 1817.<sup>66</sup> Works by Unitarian writers such as W.E. Channing and Lant Carpenter were also proposed, though this trend seems to have peaked by the 1840s.<sup>67</sup>

However, it is important not to overstate evidence for the Book Society's political leanings. At least six members of the Book Society were in the local volunteer militia, and virtually all were business or professional men, which would indicate that if they were sympathetic to reform they were not extreme radicals.<sup>68</sup> And due to its size and circulation practices, the Book Society could also respond more quickly than the Subscription Library to current demands amongst its small number of members, and could order recent works – whether they be uncontroversial novels and poets or the more politically-tinged works listed above on contemporary debates and history. Indeed, an analysis of choices in the first years, 1806–8, reveals a preference for works published or re-published within three years: Scott's *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805), Byron's *Poems* (1808), Southey's *Madoc* (1805) and Maria Edgeworth's *The Modern Griselda* (1804). There was a noticeable absence of old canon works, such as Swift and Addison. Members also did not propose reference works such as the eighteen volume *Transactions of the Society of Art* (1784–1800), which was listed in the Subscription Library's catalogue of 1802.<sup>69</sup>

66 This dominance did not last: there were fewer Unitarians in the 1840s as a result of death and resignation; SA, M.D. 2221/1 and 2221/2.

67 Ibid.

68 Thomas Ward, *Peeps into the Past*, ed. Alexander B. Bell (Sheffield: Leng & Co, 1909), p. 19.

69 SA, M.D. 2221/1; Catalogue (1802).

The Book Society operated like most other book clubs described by David Allan in *A Nation of Readers*. Titles were proposed and bought at the committee meetings (usually, but not always, monthly). They were circulated amongst the membership and then sold off at the end of the annual dinner to members and their guests. In 1826, to enable the librarian to keep track of missing books, each member was issued with a check book to record books they received and dispatched (see Figure 7.2). Members were fined 2s. 6d. if it was not produced at the annual general meeting. Unlike the Subscription Library, then, the Book Society had “neither intention nor provision to develop a rounded and enduring collection of books”.<sup>70</sup> This would have been impossible as they had no building to house such a body of work. The book club format allowed members of the Book Society (whatever the politics) to keep up with topical issues of local and national concern, but it was also possible for them to follow the latest developments in literary taste as they emerged.

### The Sheffield Book Club (1821–69)

The Sheffield Book Society of 1806 was, then, a different kind of association from the older Subscription Library and Vestry Library: it was smaller, necessarily more exclusive and circulated books on an annual basis, selling them at the end of the year rather than building towards a more permanent collection. It also had a pronounced tendency towards dissenting, reformist and, at times, radical opinion. It is perhaps for these reasons that yet another reading association, the Sheffield Book Club, was formed in 1821, “by twenty-four gentlemen of the town and neighbourhood”.<sup>71</sup> Like the Book Society, it was intended to be a much smaller and more exclusive organisation than the Subscription Library, and although there was some overlap between all three, only three people appear to have been members of both the Book Society and the Book Club simultaneously. There were also some important differences. Clerical members of the Book Club do not seem to have been Unitarian, several coming from Anglican parishes outside the town, while few of the medical men joined the Book Club. Tellingly, there were also no female members in

<sup>70</sup> Allan, *Nation of Readers*, p. 29.

<sup>71</sup> SA, JC 1505, ‘Minute Book of Sheffield Book Club, 1821–35’. The books were accessed differently to both the Book Society and the Subscription Library. The books were available to borrow and return on Club days. Unlike the Book Society, a secretary was employed to support the president “in the more laborious duties of his office”.

Title of Book.	No. of Vol.	When Received.	From whom Received.	When Due.	When Sent.	To whom Sent.
Epidemic Cholera	1	Feb. 17	J. Savate	Feb. 28	Feb. 25	Mr. Gregory
Transactions of the Philosophical Society	1	Feb. 23	John Sykes	Feb. 29	Feb. 23	D.
Westminster Review	1	Feb. 23	D.	Mar. 1	Mar. 1	D.
Transactions of the Society	2	Feb. 17	D.	Mar. 6	Mar. 6	D.
Literary Gazette	1	Feb. 29	D.	Mar. 3	Mar. 3	D.
The Monthly Repository	1	Mar. 5	D.	Mar. 9	Mar. 7	D.
The Sporting Magazine	1	Mar. 3	D.	Mar. 7	Mar. 7	D.
Blackwood's Magazine	1	D.	J. Powell	D.	D.	D.
Surgical Observations	1	Mar. 14	D.	Mar. 14	Mar. 14	Mr. Smith
Blackwood's Magazine	1	Mar. 8	D.	Mar. 12	Mar. 12	D.
Quarterly Review	1	March 11	D.	Mar. 18	Mar. 18	Mr. Gregory
London Lit. Gazette	1	Mar. 15	John Sykes	Mar. 18	Mar. 18	D.

FIGURE 7.2 A page from the check book of Michael Ellison, agent of the Duke of Norfolk. It is interesting to note the number of periodicals which are being circulated. SHEFFIELD ARCHIVES: FC/CP/48/1.

the Book Club whereas there were in the Book Society, albeit few in number, usually a member's wife or daughter.

The exclusively masculine membership of the Book Club probably points to the fact that it was more determinedly convivial in character than the earlier Book Society. According to a Report of 1848, the aim of the Book Club founders was "to promote social intercourse, as well as [of] furnishing instruction and amusement of [the] new publications".<sup>72</sup> Initially meeting in the masculine space of the inn, tavern or public house, eventually the Book Club moved to its own club house in the 1850s partly because of complaints about the quality of wines served at the Tontine Inn.<sup>73</sup> A distinctive feature of the Book Club was the laying of modest wagers at the monthly meetings. They did not involve horses or games of chance but issues of national, local or even personal interest. Some clearly evinced an interest in current affairs, so that in October 1829 Benjamin Sayle (a local ironmaster and member and later chairman of the Sheffield Reform Society), wagered a bottle of wine with Vincent Corbett (a manufacturer and agent of the Earl of Wharncliffe who was actually a guest of the club at the time, probably at the invitation of his father, the Revd Stuart Corbett) "that a locomotive machine runs between Manchester & Liverpool before the expiration of two years". (The Rainhill Trials were held in October 1829 to find the best steam locomotive for the Liverpool to Manchester Railway.)

But other wagers seemed to take on a much more explicitly political texture: in August 1830, for example, Sayle bet merchant and manufacturer Bartholomew Hounsfield "a bottle of wine that Paradise Square will contain 10,000 people. Mr Hounsfield loses".<sup>74</sup> Katrina Navickas suggests that Paradise Square was "distinctive" during the Reform debates of the 1820s and 1830s "because, unlike in other towns, it was the only square where all major political meetings of all types were held. So it never became associated solely with one political group, and indeed became a site of contestation between many".<sup>75</sup> The Book Club wager was most likely occasioned by the long-standing tradition of holding election hustings in the Square. "Upwards of 10,000 people" were reported to have attended a rally by popular independent politician Henry Brougham, a prominent supporter of parliamentary reform and the abolition of slavery, in July 1830. Sayle and Hounsfield seem to have been betting on

72 SA, JC 1852, 'Minute Book of Sheffield Book Club, 1847–1869'.

73 Ibid.

74 SA, JC 1505.

75 Katrina Navickas, 'Protest and the Politics of Space and Place Extended', consulted online at <http://protesthistory.org.uk/places-maps/sheffield>; the website accompanies Katrina Navickas, *Protest and the Politics of Space and Place, 1789–1848* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015).

whether the same feat could be achieved in the hustings held at the end of the following month by pro-Catholic Tory Richard Bethell and the reformist Whig George Howard, Viscount Morpeth – a meeting that was later reported to have attracted “a crowd upwards of 8,000”.<sup>76</sup>

There is some correlation between the members of the Book Club and the Tory-minded Pitt Club, which had several members in common, including merchant and manufacturer Peter Brownell, ironmaster and short-lived MP Samuel Walker and the aforementioned Bartholomew Hounsfield.<sup>77</sup> A political motivation may therefore lie behind the establishment of the Book Club. With the Subscription Library accommodating divergent views from either side of the political spectrum within its large membership, those with Tory leanings looking for the greater exclusivity of a small association may have preferred to form a Book Club of their own rather than associate with the more reform-minded members of the Book Society. There were several non-Unitarian ministers – the Revds William and Christopher Alderson, and Stuart Corbett – in the Book Club who were also members of the Pitt Club, perhaps not unsurprising for ministers of the Church of England. It is true that there were far fewer members of the Book Society than the Book Club who were members of the Pitt Club. However, not all members of the Book Club were Tories: Benjamin Sayle was a Liberal and reformer, and so too was Thomas Asline Ward, a committed library supporter throughout this period and a member of the Book Club from 1821 to 1826.

We may therefore look to the role of Book Club members in the Sheffield Shakespeare Club rather than the Pitt Club for insight into what underpinned their shared bonds of social cohesion. This was formed in 1818 not to express political principles, but to support cultural ones – in this case, the defence of the theatre from the Revd Thomas Best’s campaign against plays and theatre-going via his annual sermons. Notably, it contained members from both the Book Society and the Book Club. The Shakespeare Club met in the Angel Inn or the Tontine Inn, and, after a performance of a Shakespeare play, much of the evening seemed to be spent toasting leading actors and particularly one another. Thus it had a similar atmosphere of conviviality to the Book Club, and it is this rather than politics that defined our last venture in associational reading in Sheffield. Certainly, one notable absentee from the Shakespeare Club was T.A. Ward, and he was to leave the Book Club in 1826, perhaps out

76 Binfield, *History*, p. 391; John Thomas, *Local Register and Chronological Accounts of Occurrences and Facts connected with the town & neighbourhood of Sheffield*, (Sheffield: R. Leader, 1830), p. 224. For Bethell and Howard, see <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832>.

77 White, ‘Formation and Development’, p. 28.

of frustration for its emphasis on convivial entertainment rather than rational improvement.

What little evidence remains for the Book Club's approach to book collecting is also much less indicative of a political motivation. Only two minute books survive for the Book Club – one for the period 1827–35, and another for 1847–69 – complicating analysis of their book selection, but allowing for some preliminary comparative observations. In the earlier period, there is little evidence of a divergent approach to collecting works of dissent or reform. The Book Society purchased Ann Judson's account of the Baptist Mission to Burma and Job Orton's biography of the leading dissenter Philip Doddridge, but the Book Club proposed Doddridge's collected letters in 1827, and both groups ordered *The Life of Dr Samuel Parr* (1828) by William Field. There are fewer works on social reform proposed in this period in the Book Society than during the founding years discussed above, but there are still works by or about political figures, such as *Tales of Continental Life* (1827) by Constantine Phipps, a Whig politician; *The Life of Wolfe Tone by Himself* (1826) was proposed in 1827 though, in a similar vein, Teeling's *Personal Narrative of the Irish Rebellion of 1798* (1828) appeared in the Book Club in 1828.<sup>78</sup>

Indeed, in the period 1827–29, the Book Club and the Book Society chose mostly contemporary works. This included new novels by authors such as James Fenimore Cooper and Edward Bulwer Lytton. Both groups also purchased William Godwin's *History of the Commonwealth* (1824–28), Henry Hallam's *Constitutional History of England* (1827), Lord John Russell's *History of Europe* (volumes one and two, 1824–26), and, on a lighter note, Humphry Davy's *Salmonia: A History of Fly-Fishing* (1828).<sup>79</sup> Members of the Book Club, too, showed interest in contemporary issues by purchasing works on the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, the Corn Laws, the correspondence of Edmund Burke and the Peninsular War. The Book Club, like the Book Society, patronised local authors, such as James Montgomery, Joseph Hunter and Samuel Bailey. There were similar patterns in their purchases on the subjects of arts and science, divinity, geography and topography, poetry and voyages. The Book Club purchased more history and travel, and many more novels, whereas the Book Society purchased more biographies and books in the 'Morals and Miscellany' category, including periodicals, which the Book Club did not buy.<sup>80</sup>

78 SA, JC 1505 and M.D. 2221/1.

79 Ibid.

80 Between 1827–29, the Book Club bought 283 books compared to the Book Society's 108. Of that number, the Book Club bought 33 novels compared to the four purchased by the Book Society. The Club Rule 23 stipulated no reviews should be purchased, though



The balance of the evidence therefore, reinforced by their preference for fiction and for the camaraderie of the Tontine or the Angel, suggests that the Book Club was more of a convivial venture than the Book Society. However, membership of the Book Club and the Book Society often overlapped with that of various cultural and municipal associations, including the Subscription Library. For example, several Book Club and Book Society members served as Town Trustees, magistrates or as volunteers in the local militia.

### Conclusion

Reading Sheffield interviewees came from a more heterogeneous background than the members of the four eighteenth- and nineteenth-century library clubs introduced here. Like the members of the Book Club who eschewed reviews, they did not look to publications to inform their choice of reading. Book choices in the age of the modern Public Library tend to have been serendipitous: some interviewees read all the works by an author once discovered, others relied on a relative or a lodger to introduce them to the new. The superb municipal library services in mid-twentieth century Sheffield far outweighed the influence of book shops or tuppenny libraries. The members of the earlier reading associations collectively shaped the libraries and book selections: they determined the prevailing rules, agreed their co-members, and voted in their book choices. Reading Sheffield's twentieth-century readers had less power to shape their reading lives and little sense that reading could be a tool to improve their social status.

The four early library associations reflect a good deal of intellectual curiosity and cultural interest in a town that might appear to be preoccupied with practical industry and making money. The choice of books reflects the radical thinking of many of the members, notably Unitarians, perhaps more so where they created a relatively private space for themselves as in the Vestry Library, the Book Society and the Book Club, whose records were private and handwritten, rather than printed. It is important to recognise that there were also more conservative choices too, particularly in a turbulent period when a community's book choices could have dangerously political implications – particularly when made available to public scrutiny in the form of the Subscription Library's published catalogues.

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this could have been on the grounds of cost. The Society members proposed a range of periodicals, presumably to aid them in their choice of titles; SA, JC 1505.

The production of a printed catalogue with a full list of subscribers is itself an expression of corporate identity which reflects the civic nature of the reading practices of the Subscription Library. The records of the three other associations are more private documents, which have survived through chance or the historical sense of their owners. However, even in the smaller book groups, careful minutes were kept, book titles were proposed and voted on, even though these titles would be sold at the end of each year at a formal event, with printed lists of titles to be sold. The Book Society held a Centenary Dinner in 1906, the programme of which listed the members from 1806. Moreover, it continued to meet and record minutes throughout World War I and most of World War II, which indicates that members felt the society to be an institution whose memories needed to be preserved. Nevertheless, all these records provide only partial answers to our questions, and we are left to extrapolate from membership lists and book choices what reading meant to individual readers and to the wider communities to which they belonged; with our modern readers we can ask them directly. Interestingly, the catalogues of the libraries which our twentieth-century readers used have not been preserved because of library procedures, the constraints of space and the processes of digitisation. Material evidence of book choices available to our more recent subjects is therefore absent.

The greatest contrast between recent readers and their forebears is the extent to which reading was a private or a public affair. Whereas the eighteenth-century reader is likely to have read to “enhance... social cohesion”,<sup>81</sup> our twentieth-century readers rarely discussed the books they read with other people; membership of book clubs is never mentioned. Reading seems to have been a private affair, valued as such. Tellingly, only for two members of the Communist Party do reading tastes seem to have been readily shared and discussed. It was chiefly to enrich the interior life that our interviewees read. Their private book choices were free of the kind of social and political pressures which voting and cataloguing book choices imposed upon members of the Subscription Library as they collectively performed Sheffield's civic culture and linked it with British intellectual life as a wider whole. The much more private spaces of the Vestry Library, Book Society and Book Club allowed the freedom to pursue the interests of their respective groups (which often overlapped) but which again acknowledged the importance of community reading. And in one recorded instance of community action, the Book Society returned a book to the bookseller even before it could be circulated, presumably on moral grounds rather than political: Pierce Egan's racy *Life in London* (1821).

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81 Allan, *Nation of Readers*, p. 14.

## Challenging Institutional Ambitions: The Practice of Book Exchanges at the New York Society Library, 1789–1795

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The social library in the eighteenth-century Atlantic world has usually been approached through examination of institutional records such as meeting minutes, acquisition records or borrowing ledgers. These sources are useful because they offer insights into the successes and problems of the institution under investigation, into its purchasing practices through local or transatlantic markets for books and into the interests and borrowing habits of its users. Using these sources the institution is situated at the centre of the narrative, making the library the institutional domain in which a historical phenomenon, such as changing reading habits, the development of the public sphere or the pursuit of sociability, is investigated.<sup>1</sup> Though valuable for its integration of the social library into the wider cultural and political history of the eighteenth century, this body of work renders opaque the changing mechanisms libraries developed, elaborated and discarded to meet their purposes. This chapter takes a different approach by investigating the practices and choices of the library as *an institution* to defamiliarise libraries' responses to their local communities. It argues that researching the mechanisms by which libraries worked to exchange the materials of culture in their communities offers a means of understanding both how libraries attempted to influence the communities they served and how those communities in turn worked to shape the institution. While circulation and purchasing records are the most often studied modes of exchange, other forms, such as donations, were a common occurrence, particularly in social and institutional libraries, and suggest important questions

1 For examples of work in this tradition, see James Raven, *London Booksellers and American Customers: Transatlantic Literary Community and the Charleston Library Society, 1748–1811* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2002); James Green, 'Subscription Libraries and Commercial Circulating Libraries in Colonial Philadelphia and New York', in Thomas Augst and Kenneth Carpenter (eds.), *Institutions of Reading: The Social Life of Libraries in the United States* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), pp. 53–71; Susanna Ashton, 'A Corrupt Medium: Stephen Burroughs and the Bridgehampton, New York, library', *Libraries & Culture*, 38.2 (2003), pp. 93–120.

about the relationships subsisting between libraries, benefactors and users.<sup>2</sup> Little work has been done to explore the intellectual, political and social ramifications of individual donations or to consider donation within the wider world of eighteenth-century charity and humanitarianism.<sup>3</sup>

Beyond donations and purchases, scholars have not explored other practices of exchange libraries engaged in with their users and their wider communities. The library is a tremendously flexible institutional mechanism for enabling exchanges of the materials of culture between individuals, yet we know surprisingly little about the variety of institutional mechanisms they have developed to fulfil this purpose. By suggesting the organising rubric of exchange as the library's primary function, I want to open a broader conversation about the dynamic institutional possibilities the library created in the eighteenth-century Atlantic world. I argue for understanding the library in this way not from a Whiggish faith in the liberating power of the diffusion of information for generating political transformation. Despite manifold and well-documented inequalities in access, content and availability, social libraries were remarkably successful in their efforts to enable exchange within the communities they served. This success was so unqualified that it sometimes

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2 University libraries have done the most extensive work to publicise the major donations they received over the course of the eighteenth century. Records of donations to Harvard, Yale and William and Mary in this period have been transcribed and published: Henry Cadbury, 'Bishop Berkeley's Gifts to the Harvard Library', *Harvard Library Bulletin*, 7 (1953), pp. 73–87; Ann Stokely Pratt, *Isaac Watts and his Gift of Books to Yale College* (New Haven: Yale University Library, 1938); John Jennings, *The Library of the College of William and Mary in Virginia, 1693–1793* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1968). The efforts of the Revd Thomas Bray and missionary societies to found libraries for parishes of the Church of England have also been well documented: Charles Laughler, *Thomas Bray's Grand Design: Libraries of the Church of England in America, 1695–1785* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1973). Of early American social libraries, the Library Company of Philadelphia has published most extensively on books that were received into its collection through donation over the course of the eighteenth century. For a guide to the printed records of those donations, see Edwin Wolf II, *At the Instance of Benjamin Franklin: A Brief History of the Library Company of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Library Company of Philadelphia, 1995).

3 The most thorough work has been done on the donation practices of learned men to university libraries in the eighteenth century, *supra* note 2. Beyond those sources, relatively little is known of what motivated small donations from otherwise obscure individuals to social libraries and other voluntary organisations. For an examination of motivations for donation to public libraries in a later period, see Suzanne M. Stauffer, 'In their Own Image: The Public Library Collection as a Reflection of its Donors', *Libraries & the Cultural Record*, 42.4 (2007), pp. 387–408.

even escaped the conservative institutional mandates that these institutions set for themselves.

To situate these larger arguments in a more immediate context, this chapter will examine the New York Society Library's practice of allowing new subscribers to offer books to the library in exchange for a share in the library to demonstrate how innovations in the practices of exchange worked both to extend and challenge this institution's own purposes. The Society Library's development of this form of exchange enacted the somewhat contradictory impulses of the library to assume a place of national prestige and power within the new United States while also enlarging its membership to ensure its continued financial viability. Transforming older arguments for the uses of sociability for communal improvement that had led to the founding of libraries across the Atlantic world into arguments for the necessity of the widespread diffusion of knowledge to preserve the nascent republic, the Society Library attempted to retain its cultural prestige and yet expand its popular appeal. This negotiation between authority and popularity, prestige and accessibility, and exclusivity and openness is evident in the books received by the library, which at once affirmed and contradicted the institutional ideals it had set for itself.

Re-founded at the same moment that the new federal government was arriving in New York City, the Society Library's trustees developed an institutional rhetoric through newspapers, magazines and their own publications that emphasised republican political and Enlightened intellectual aims. Yet this rhetorical stance masked the institutional problems – a damaged library, no home for the collection and desperately needed revenue from both new and old subscribers – that likely pushed the trustees to issue shares in return for book exchanges. When the results of this practice of exchange are examined, the twenty-seven receipts surviving from 1789–95 document that it was most successful in collecting novels for the library rather than works that mirrored the trustees' political and intellectual aims. These novels proved to be popular with the library's members and point to a powerful discontinuity between the institutional purposes articulated by the trustees and the interests of members, offering a cautionary tale about over-reliance on institutional pronouncements for understanding both the purposes and practices of that institution.

### Re-Founding the Library

In December 1788, a call for a meeting of the trustees of the New York Society Library was placed in several New York newspapers, the first such call in fourteen years. The trustees had not met since 1775 because the normal

operations of the library had been disrupted first by the British occupation of New York from 1776 to 1783 and then by the lengthy post-war depression. The immediate impetus for re-founding the library likely arose from the hope of keeping the new federal government in New York, but the call for the trustees' meeting put the question more generally by stating it was a meeting merely "to consult on measures for the speedy re-establishment of [a] useful institution".<sup>4</sup> The emphasis on the 'usefulness' of the library was a common claim for cultural institutions of the period and suggests the hope that the Society Library's rebirth would offer benefits to its subscribers, New York City and, if the city remained the national capital, the United States as a whole.<sup>5</sup> Re-opening in the euphoria and trepidation of early national New York, the Society Library faced the challenge of appealing to individual, civic, state and national hopes about the future of the new nation.

The trustees' meeting duly took place on 20 December 1788 and a brief description of the meeting was printed in the *Daily Advertiser* on 6 January 1789.<sup>6</sup> By all measures, the re-founded library's position was bleak. Portions of its collection had been destroyed, looted or simply lost during the British occupation and the neglect of the post-war period; additionally, the library had never had a permanent building of its own, and was, upon the re-founding, housed in the newly renovated Federal Hall. This was a useful location because it put the Society Library up the stairs from the federal Congress, but it also must have been an embarrassment to need to rely on the largesse of the federal government to even house the collection. Beyond these immediate difficulties, the library had little in the way of available funds and needed both to reintegrate old subscribers who had previously supported the library and to appeal

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4 By the late 1780s, New York City was beginning to recover from the post-War slump, but it remained on fragile economic footing for the rest of the century: Edwin Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 277–334. The battle for the new location of the national capital ended with the selection of Washington, DC; a comprehensive account of those negotiations can be found in Kenneth Bowling, 'Neither in a Wigwam nor the Wilderness. Competitors for the Federal Capital, 1787–1790', *Prologue: Quarterly of the National Archives*, 20.3 (1988), pp. 163–79.

5 For the development of this claim in institutional rhetoric, see Meyer Reinhold, 'The Quest for "Useful Knowledge" in Eighteenth-Century America', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 119.2 (1975), pp. 108–32.

6 *Daily Advertiser*, 12 December 1788. An earlier call for lost books to be returned to the library had been published in 1784, soon after the end of the British occupation, but no record exists of whether any books were recovered as a result. For a reprinting of the call, see Austin Keep, *History of the New York Society Library* (New York: De Vinne Press, 1908), pp. 201–02.

to new subscribers who would have to take it seriously as a financially viable institution.<sup>7</sup>

The trustees chose not to address these problems in the newspaper account of their meeting; instead, they emphasised the potential benefits the re-founded library would have for its subscribers and for New York City. The trustees situated the Society Library as an independent and self-regulating institution that did not need benevolent assistance to survive as a going concern, but that instead offered a growing investment opportunity for potential subscribers, the New York City government and the federal government. After acknowledging that the Society Library was planning to re-open and call for new subscribers, they set out three purposes the re-founded institution would serve.

The first purpose, as the call for the trustees' meeting had noted, was that the library would be a "useful" institution that "[provided] ready information ... for the philosopher, the politician, and the artist"; "[introduced] improvement[s] in the arts and sciences"; "[promoted the] general diffusion of knowledge"; "[advanced] true taste"; and "[increased] public virtue". In making this argument, the trustees were relying on an Enlightenment faith in the value of voluntary organisation for the pursuit of knowledge that, as David Allan has demonstrated, reached its institutional apotheosis in the founding of social libraries and natural philosophical societies across the Atlantic world as polite, civic institutions that enabled both individual and social improvement.<sup>8</sup> The American Revolutionary experience had given these older ideas a distinctly political cast by conjoining this affirmation of voluntary activity with a republican belief in the importance of an informed citizenry.<sup>9</sup> The Society Library's claim to increase "public virtue" and promote the "general diffusion

7 *Daily Advertiser*, 6 January 1789. The damage to the collection was a consistent refrain in accounts of the library during this period, particularly in comparison to the intact collection of the Library Company of Philadelphia: 'From the Federal Gazette', *New-York Packet*, 6 February 1789; 'To the Town of Philadelphia', *New-York Packet*, 10 February 1789; 'On the Utility of Public Libraries', *New-York Magazine and Literary Repository*, 2 (June 1791), pp. 308–09.

8 For a fuller account of these processes, see David Allan, *A Nation of Readers: The Lending Library in Georgian England* (London: British Library, 2008) and 'Politeness and the Politics of Culture: An Intellectual History of the Eighteenth-Century Subscription Library', *Library & Information History*, 29.3 (August 2013), pp. 159–69.

9 *Daily Advertiser*, 12 December 1788. The development and impact of the early national ideology of an informed citizenry is traced in Richard D. Brown, *The Strength of a People: The Idea of an Informed Citizenry in America, 1650–1870* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Richard John, *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

of knowledge” had specifically national implications in the new republic and emphasises the national scale of its ambitions.

The second purpose was to establish the Society Library as a sound investment for potential subscribers. The trustees emphasised the security of potential subscribers’ investments by explaining that a share was a type of heritable property as secure as land or other material wealth: “each [share is] an estate which the [subscriber lays] up for his heirs, or which he may sell to whom he pleases”. This emphasis on futurity highlights the trustees’ hopes for the long-term stability and expansion of the library and their acknowledgement of their responsibility for securing its continuance beyond their own tenures. The trustees were not offering empty assurances; one of their first acts in 1789 was to apply for a confirmation of their charter of incorporation – originally granted by George III – from the New York legislature. Their actions were not the result of concerns about the viability of the library as a business; through the end of the 1790s, cities and educational institutions were the most common applicants for articles of incorporation from state governments. Unlike its counterparts in Great Britain, which were more informal in organisation and did not seek formal state incorporation, the Society Library showed a conscious concern with guaranteeing its own futurity. The decision to reconfirm the charter emphasised the continuity of the institution with its pre-Revolutionary history, drawing attention to longevity and confirming it as a good investment for current and future subscribers.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, establishing the link with the pre-Revolutionary charter suggested the possibility of improvement without the necessity of dramatic change, producing an impression of an institution that was simultaneously conservative and dynamic, both grounded in the past and ready to engage the future.

The final purpose was to increase the prestige of New York City, by “add[ing] to the inducement which Congress [had] to remain” instead of removing to another city such as Philadelphia, which, not incidentally, was home to the much larger and better accommodated Library Company. Though many writers of the 1780s commented on the intensity of economic, social and cultural

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10 Ibid. The importance of incorporation for civic institutions and public projects in the early United States is argued in Pauline Maier, ‘The Revolutionary Origins of the American Corporation’, *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 50.1 (1993), pp. 51–84; Peter Dobkin Hall, ‘Organizational Values and the Origins of the Corporation in Connecticut, 1760–1860’, *Connecticut History*, 29 (1988), pp. 63–90. The Society Library’s charter of incorporation was confirmed by the New York assembly on 18 February 1789. For the text of that act, see *The Charter, Bye-laws, and Names of the Members of the New-York Society Library* (New York: Hugh Gaine, 1789), pp. 11–12.



activity in New York, the devastation of the British occupation was still keenly felt, most obviously in the large sections of the city that were still mostly burnt-out wrecks. Several letters to newspapers in 1788–90, written between the ‘sister’ cities of Philadelphia and New York, made the difference in library provision in the two cities one of the measures by which to judge which city was more appropriate as the national capital. Of course, the newly re-founded Society Library did not measure up well against the Library Company, which had survived the upheavals of the Revolution almost completely intact. The trustees clearly felt it necessary to establish that New York was addressing this apparent deficiency, although their efforts would ultimately prove futile when the capital was moved temporarily to Philadelphia and then to Washington, D.C.<sup>11</sup>

By situating the library within the emergent republican institutional tradition, the trustees embraced a rhetoric of civic disinterestedness that highlighted the public benefits and thus public power of their private endeavour. Their claim of providing for futurity established that the Society Library from the outset was in no danger of failing or closing due to lack of funds or subscribers, even though this could not be assumed before it had re-opened. By asserting a role in keeping the federal government in New York, the trustees established that the library was intervening in national politics and thus established its prestige while also contributing to the growth of the cultural and political power of New York.

### Crafting the Institutional Image

These ambitions register in other aspects of the trustees’ activities during 1789. With the re-founding, the trustees decided that the Society Library should have a new bookplate engraved and printed to mark its ownership of its acquisitions. The bookplate being replaced had been commissioned in 1758 and had been in use up to the library’s closure in 1774. The older plate had likely been lost in the fourteen-year hiatus in library operations, and the trustees’ decision to replace it with an entirely new design, rather than having the old plate re-engraved from a printed copy of the bookplate in the surviving collection, establishes that the trustees deemed a new visual identity appropriate for the re-founded institution. Juxtaposing the two plates with one another demonstrates how the trustees’ ambitions were expressed iconographically as well as rhetorically.

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11 Ibid. The newspaper conflict, *supra* note 4, as well as ‘The Contrast’, *New-York Packet*, 18 January 1791.

As Figure 8.1 shows, the older plate was made up of several traditional motifs: Apollo looks down protectively over the heraldic seal of the library. Mercury, or medicine, on the left and Minerva, or politics and the law, on the right rest their hands on the seal and look on solemnly at the various endeavours it will enable. The seal emphasises the Society Library's role in promoting (counter-clockwise from top-right) religion, astronomy, the arts of navigation and literature – which takes iconographic form as the library itself. Below, an ideal city rises, presumably New York, suggestively named Athens in the Greek appellation beneath. Through its support of the liberal arts, the library advances both learning and civilisation, making New York a new Athens, emulating and perhaps even exceeding its classical namesake. Yet, this is clearly an aspiration, as the two Latin quotations in the lower left make clear. The first, on the lectern beneath the candle, reads “sed in candelabro” or “but by candle light”, suggesting deep commitment to reading and study and thus a reverential attitude toward the practices of scholarship. The other, inscribed on the open book, reads “Nosce teipsum” or “Know thyself”, and points both to the necessity of philosophy as a process of self-discovery and to reading and writing as reflective processes of growth and self-improvement. Thus, the power in this image is clearly in the apparatus of classical imagery and language, not in the library. Occupying only a tiny corner of the image and with ambitions only for the improvement of its home city, the library is a devotee to the practice of philosophical self-improvement and ‘useful’ knowledge but not an actor or even participant in the political order.

The new plate the trustees had engraved offers a strikingly different visual repertoire for the Society Library's ambitions. This plate transforms the library from an inconsequential detail within a largely classical iconography into the iconographic world itself. As Figure 8.2 shows, the library is now the scene of action, with a kneeling Native American offering up his weapon to the standing Columbia, one of the symbols of the new United States, who is both handing a book to the Native American and also pointing to the motto “Emollit Mores”, on the moulding above the shelf.<sup>12</sup> The motto can be translated as “softens manners” and is a fragment of a couplet from the Roman poet Ovid. The entire couplet reads, “Note that faithful application to the liberal arts/ softens behaviour and does not permit barbarism”, making clear that access to liberal

12 For descriptions and examples of the changing symbols of the American colonies and later the United States, see E. McClung Fleming, ‘The American Image as Indian Princess, 1765–1783’, *Winterthur Portfolio*, 2 (1965), pp. 65–81; E. McClung Fleming, ‘From Indian Princess to Greek Goddess: The American Image, 1783–1815’, *Winterthur Portfolio*, 3 (1967), pp. 37–66.



FIGURE 8.1 *New York Society Library Bookplate, 1758.*  
COURTESY OF NEW YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY.



FIGURE 8.2 *New York Society Library Bookplate, 1789.*

COURTESY OF THE NEW YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY.

learning is being offered to the Native American for his disavowal of violence and act of obeisance.<sup>13</sup> This exchange emblematises how the goal of the diffusion of knowledge discussed above was cast into imperial terms that equated growth in knowledge with growth in power, symbolised here by the equivalence between the book and hatchet.<sup>14</sup> That the library is placed at Columbia's right hand symbolises both that it is favoured by Columbia and empowered as her agent, establishing its importance in the growth and expansion of, not just the city of New York, but the United States as a whole.

### Practicing Exchange

The trustees' expansive purposes and new visual identity for the re-founded Society Library establish their concern for assuming a role of importance in the intellectual and political life of the new republic. Yet, this boisterous rhetorical stance did not solve the problems the library faced. Far from being independent, the Society Library relied on the voluntary consent of its members to invest in its future. This basic institutional reality is most apparent in the trustees' choice to offer membership in the library to those who would give books in exchange. The trustees' made this offer in the 6 January letter discussed above:

[Resolved]: to admit new members, upon paying into the hands of [the] treasurer the sum of five pounds; which was the original sum paid by the first subscribers, and which each share is now worth; or in lieu of money to receive books to that amount, provided they are such as the committee chosen for that purpose shall approve.

This advertisement ran in full in several New York newspapers until 1791.<sup>15</sup> In large part, this call was successful: until the Society Library discontinued the practice of exchange in 1794, fifty-five new subscribers were admitted to the

13 Ovid, *Tristia and Ex Ponto*, trans. Arthur Wheeler (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1924), p. 363.

14 Education was consistently used as a means of colonising Native Americans. For an excellent recent account of these efforts and indigenous people's negotiation with and subversion of them, see Hilary Wyss, *English Letters and Indian Literacies: Reading, Writing, and New England Missionary Schools, 1750–1830* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

15 Based on a search of the charters and newspaper notices of other social libraries, the New York Society Library is the only eighteenth-century American social library that formally offered to accept books in lieu of cash or commodities for a membership share. Each share an individual possessed allowed him or her to borrow a single book from the library

library by exchanging books for a share. Choosing to offer this exchange to possible members was a compromise that confirmed the Society Library's status as an independent institution while still offering the benefits of gathering new books for the damaged collection. The trustees could have asked for donations from the community in order to rebuild the collection, but this would have been an explicit admission of need, which challenged the image the trustees were crafting for the library. By setting the terms as those of an exchange, the trustees were able to establish their superiority to subscribers; applicants had to bring books to offer to the library, books which could be rejected if they did not match the purposes set out by the trustees.

The success of this strategy and its consonance with the trustees' understanding of the library's purposes and prestige can be seen more directly when compared with the failure of a call for donations three years later in 1791. In that year, John Pintard, a successful merchant and aspiring antiquarian, was elected as a trustee and set about making the library a repository for historical materials.<sup>16</sup> The result of his efforts was a call for donations that appeared in a revised version of the Library's call for new subscribers:

The Trustees are anxious to make a collection of all pamphlets and other publications, that in any manner relate to the history or politics of this country, before or since the revolution. – Several donations of this kind already have been made to the Library, and it is hoped that gentlemen who are possessed of such papers will deposit them there, and make them thro' that medium more extensively useful.<sup>17</sup>

The claim of disseminating useful knowledge through preserving and making available the history of the United States would seem to fit with the goals outlined by the trustees in 1789, but the call for donations is incongruent in that it establishes the need of the institution for donation rather than attempting to establish relations on favourable grounds for the library. The trustees' minutes for the meeting immediately before this advertisement was published are

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at any one time. For an enumeration of the powers provided by a share, see the *Charter*, pp. 11–12.

16 During the same year, Pintard was also working to establish one of the first museums in New York at Tammany Hall: Joel Orosz, *Curators and Culture: The Museum Movement in America, 1740–1870* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002), pp. 58–61. Although this initiative and the museum both failed, he would later be instrumental in the founding of the New-York Historical Society: David Sterling, 'New York Patriarch: A Life of John Pintard, 1759–1844', unpublished PhD thesis, New York University, 1958, pp. 215–49.

17 'New-York Society Library', *Daily Advertiser*, 25 August 1791.

concise: "Resolved That the purchasing committee acquaint the public with the State and Value of the Library, *solicit Pamphlets* and give notice that twelve and an half dollars [is] inadequate to the real value of a share".<sup>18</sup> The call seems to have been recorded and assented to as a matter of course, without fanfare or interest. Pintard's failure to raise the interest of his fellow trustees was mirrored in the failure of the call to generate any donations. Yet, during the exact same month, several individuals received a share for books they had exchanged with the library, suggesting that this practice was congruent both with the aims of the trustees and the interests of potential subscribers while donation was not. The failure of the call might also relate to the problem of pamphlets' ephemerality; perhaps few individuals felt it worth their effort to prioritise gathering up what were mostly works of topical import for preservation.

The records of these book exchanges come from the Society Library's account books, which show that fifty-five new members were admitted by giving books, and from the thirty-three surviving receipts that remain for individual exchanges.<sup>19</sup> Of those thirty-three receipts, twenty-seven identify the books the library received. No evidence survives of any negotiations that occurred before exchanges were recorded, but the records do make clear that all aspects of the exchanges were handled by the Purchasing Committee, a sub-committee of the board of trustees. The composition of the Purchasing Committee varied over the five years that the library continued book exchanges, but it was always made up of two to three members who worked independently in negotiating with potential subscribers. The most involved member of the Purchasing Committee during this entire period was Brockholst Livingston, who served from 1789 to 1791; the majority of the surviving receipts come from transactions that he recorded. Livingston was a wealthy lawyer and later appointed to the United States Supreme Court. His efforts on behalf of the Society Library were one of his many commitments to various civic and charitable organisations in early national New York.<sup>20</sup>

Although the vision and goals of the trustees are clear, the identities and purposes of those individuals who chose to exchange books for a share in the library are more diverse and less open to generalisation. However, a brief

18 New York Society Library Archives (hereafter, NYSLA), 'Minutes of the Proceedings of the Trustees of the Library', p. 55.

19 NYSLA, 'Account Book, 1754–1795'; 'Account Book, 1791–1795'. A complete list of these donations can be found on the Community Libraries website: <https://communitylibraries.net/>.

20 Timothy Hall, 'Henry Brockholst Livingston', *Supreme Court Justices: A Biographical Dictionary* (New York: Facts on File, 2001), pp. 55–58.

demographic overview makes clear that most would not seem to have been the professionals – such as lawyers, politicians, doctors, and ministers – that the trustees would have preferred. Of the fifty-five subscribers, fifty-three were men, two were women. The overwhelming preponderance of men is unsurprising; the two women offer an intriguing opportunity to examine women's book ownership in the early republic, but unfortunately neither of their receipts is extant. Based on an examination of New York City directories from 1789–93, the professions of thirty-eight of the men can be determined: eighteen were merchants, nine were professional men, five produced luxury items, three were manufacturers, two were clerks, and one was a cartman. As I mentioned above, only a small minority were engaged in the traditional professions – the law, the ministry or the practice of medicine – that would be expected to own the kinds of books that would meet the trustees' purposes for the library as a political and intellectual institution. The commercial character of the city is reflected in the preponderance of merchants, and the heterogeneity of the books they donated suggests their eclectic tastes and that reading was not an aspect of their working lives, as it was for those trained for the traditional professions in the colleges of the early republic.

The twenty-seven surviving receipts include men from every occupational group and thus serve as a fairly representative cross-section of the entire set of subscribers who made an exchange to gain membership. A cursory examination of the donations establishes that the Society Library, despite the efforts of the trustees to establish the intellectual and political seriousness of its endeavour, was forced to meet its subscribers on their terms. Even though they likely hoped for learned or historical books, the Purchasing Committee was constrained by the books offered by interested potential subscribers. The results were sometimes quite amusing. For example, Nicholas Roosevelt, a wealthy sugar merchant and ancestor of Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt, exchanged seven novels – several of them clearly salacious, such as *Love and Madness* and *Retribution* – in order to receive his share. William Rhodes, another merchant, gave thirteen novels to receive his share; his selection shows a similar taste for sensational works. The single largest donation of novels and literary works came from the merchant Thomas Sterlitz, who gave one hundred and sixty-eight German books, many of which were novels or collections of poetry. Although these men were extreme cases, novels were the most common genre of books exchanged for a share. Thirteen different subscribers gave at least one novel, while six gave two or more. Most of these novels came from merchants, but an attorney and a doctor both also exchanged novels. Overall, novels were the most exchanged genre, with thirty-three different titles represented. As Table 8.1 shows, novels



TABLE 8.1 *Genres of books most commonly exchanged for shares.*

Novel	33
History	15
Theological Work	13
Natural Philosophy	11
Reference Work	11
Total	83

were twice as common as histories, the next most commonly exchanged genre, and three times as common as works of natural philosophy or reference.<sup>21</sup>

While novels dominated overall in the surviving exchanges, the Purchasing Committee did occasionally negotiate exchanges that seem more aligned with the trustees' rhetoric. Abraham Moore, the sole cartman on the list, gave a folio book about the geography of the ancient world, while Peter Maverick, an engraver, gave a reference book on heraldry. William Samuel Johnson, the President of Columbia College and a member of the House of Representatives, gave thirty-six volumes of the *Journal of the House of Commons* and received three shares because of the size of the donation; this exchange met a longstanding need of the Library, which had been attempting to complete its set of the *Journal* since 1773.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps the best example of an individual whose choice of books would seem to match the trustees' purposes was Edward Greswold, who gave a set of the French *Encyclopédie*, for which the Library gave him twenty shares.

While successful, these subscribers who joined through exchanges were not the main source of the Society Library's growth; from 1789 to 1793, the Library gained 653 new subscribers, which indicates the success of the trustees' institutional vision in attracting new members. The fifty-five members who chose to exchange books for shares represent only about eight percent of new subscribers.<sup>23</sup> Though the subscribers who exchanged books for shares were only

21 For the purposes of this analysis, I have left Sterlitz's books out because the only list of the titles of his books is an English language translation given in the Library's 1793 catalogue: *The Charter, Bye-Laws, and Names of the Members of the New-York Society Library* (New York: T. and J. Swords, 1793).

22 I am indebted to Jennifer Furlong for this discovery: 'Books as Means of Exchange at the New York Society Library, c. 1788–1805', ASECS Annual Conference (Los Angeles, 2015).

23 This number was arrived at through comparing the total number of subscribers in the 1789 Library catalogue to the total in the 1793 catalogue.

a very small subset of the overall growth, the books they exchanged proved to be enormously popular with the library's members. This popularity can be established based on the records that have been digitised through the City Readers Database, which has made available all of the library's circulation records between the re-founding in 1789 and the end of 1792. City Readers offers a list of the books most often checked out by members during this period, and this list shows that the books received through exchange, particularly the novels, circulated more than almost any other books the library bought during this period. For example, *Honorina Sommerville*, one of the novels exchanged by Nicholas Roosevelt, is the eighth most popular book on the list. Because the City Readers Database also notes when the titles in the list first appeared in the Society library's catalogue, it is possible to determine that it is the second most popular book the library received or bought after its re-foundation. Six of the titles more popular than it were listed in the 1789 catalogue and thus had been part of the collection before the library's re-founding, while only one was purchased after the 1789 catalogue was issued. Six other titles – all of them novels – are also present in the one hundred most circulated titles.<sup>24</sup> Thus, the popularity of novels in the sample of book exchanges is matched in the overall circulation of books at the Society Library and suggests that the Purchasing Committee may have been knowingly taking books that it knew would be popular with the library's members, even though they did not necessarily match the trustees' publicly articulated purposes.

### Conclusion

The success of the practice of book exchange at the New York Society Library seems to have been the cause of its own disappearance. As I noted earlier, most of the surviving receipts were made out by Brockholst Livingston, who served on the Purchasing Committee from 1789–91, immediately after re-foundation. Later members of the Purchasing Committee seem to have been both less motivated to find new subscribers who wished to exchange books and more reluctant to record exchanges when they did occur. As the Society Library proved successful the practice likely stopped because it was too much work to ask of trustees, who served without pay and who were not necessarily interested in negotiating book exchanges. By 1795, the library could afford to hire a librarian whose primary responsibility was the maintenance and growth of the collection through purchases from New York booksellers.<sup>25</sup>

24 <http://cityreaders.nysoclib.org>, 4 December 2013.

25 Keep, *History*, p. 243.

The disjunction between the trustees' institutional vision and the actual practice of the Purchasing Committee highlights the often striking difference between an institution's goals and its day-to-day practices. While the Society Library hoped to establish itself as an institution of both local and national importance dedicated to the dissemination of useful and polite knowledge, its subscribers and members seem to have been more interested in exchanging and reading fiction. I call attention to this contradiction to argue for a broader exploration of what libraries in the eighteenth-century Atlantic world wanted to do in their communities and what communities demonstrated they wanted of libraries. Previous accounts, such as James Green's analysis of the competition between the Library Company of Philadelphia, rival social libraries and circulating libraries, have suggested that social libraries were forced to adapt to a changing market based on consumer interests.<sup>26</sup> But my investigation makes clear that social libraries were willing to articulate a vision of their purposes grounded in the intellectual hopes of the Enlightenment and political demands of the new republic while at the same time developing institutional practices that allowed for the meeting of their members' needs.

As I suggested in the introduction, the library is a highly adaptable institutional mechanism for exchanging the materials of culture between individuals, and more work is needed to uncover and elucidate the institutional practices they have engaged in to fulfil this purpose. Rediscovering and contextualising these practices, and the sometimes seemingly contradictory ends they served, would do much to further our understanding of how and why some libraries succeeded where others failed. As one scholar of early libraries has put the problem for libraries throughout the Atlantic world: "[T]he average expectation of life of the social library was not great. Relatively few survived their founders".<sup>27</sup> The New York Society Library is perhaps the best example of a library that both survived its founders and managed to grow in spite of all challenges. Further investigation at the Society Library and other libraries could bring to light other practices, otherwise forgotten, that helped libraries develop, maintain and strengthen their collections and their connections to their communities.

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26 Green, 'Subscription Libraries', pp. 68–71.

27 Jesse Shera, *Foundations of the Public Library: The Origins of the Public Library Movement in New England, 1629–1855* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), p. 72.

## A “Quaint Corner” of the Reading Nation: Romantic Readerships in Rural Perthshire, 1780–1830

Katie Halsey\*

In 1898, William Stewart of the *Glasgow Herald* wrote an article about Innerpeffray Library, a tiny late seventeenth-century public lending library in rural Perthshire, describing it as “a quaint corner of libraria”, and commenting in surprise on its founder’s early commitment to providing rural labourers with access to books.<sup>1</sup> Innerpeffray Library was founded in (or around) 1680 by David Drummond, third Lord Madertie, who left the sum of 5000 Scots marks in his will for the establishment of a library which was to be “preserved entire and to be augmented by my successors yearly in time coming in measure underwritten for the benefit and encouragement of young students”.<sup>2</sup> Madertie’s will stipulated that a keeper of books or librarian should be employed, that new books should be purchased yearly, and that a schoolhouse should be built. Madertie’s successors seem to have interpreted the phrase “young students” liberally, and a further Deed of Mortification which solved some of the various legal problems posed by Madertie’s original Will interpreted the library as being for the benefit of the local community more broadly (“for the benefit of the country”),<sup>3</sup> allowing almost any member of the community to read the

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\* I am grateful to the Governors of the Mortification of Innerpeffray Library for permission to reproduce unpublished manuscript material, to the Keeper of Books at Innerpeffray Library, Ms Lara Haggerty, for her invaluable local knowledge, to my research assistant, Dr Kate Buchanan, whose tireless transcriptions of the Borrowers’ Registers made the writing of this chapter significantly easier and more pleasurable, and to my PhD student, Jill Dye, for her helpful fact-checking. Thanks to Katherine Inglis, for pointing out the similarities in language between the American Library Association’s materials and William Young’s petition. I also acknowledge with gratitude the Carnegie Trust, the Delmas Foundation, the School of Arts and Humanities, University of Stirling, and the Strathmartine Trust, whose financial support made the transcription and digitisation of the Borrowers’ Registers possible.

1 William Stewart, ‘A Quaint Corner in Libraria’, *Glasgow Herald*, issue 133, Saturday 4 June 1898.

2 Innerpeffray Library [hereafter IL], Founder’s MS 1691/001, David Drummond, third Lord Madertie, Will, 1691.

3 IL, Miscellaneous MS 1825/002, ‘Memorial of the Right Honorable the Earl of Kinnoull for the opinion of Counsel regarding the Library of Innerpeffray’, p. 12.

library's books, and only "restricting the use of the library to six or more parishes around".<sup>4</sup>

Under the terms of the Mortification, trustees – drawn from the important local landowning families – were appointed to manage the library, with the assumption that this trusteeship would be passed down through the later generations of these families. This would become a source of tension in due course, as later generations of trustees neglected their duties to the library and to its users, who, denied a formal say in the administration of the library and its acquisitions policy, nonetheless felt a strong sense of ownership over it.

Books from the library were made available to the local community from at least 1747 (although this may have been earlier; borrowers' records are only extant from 1747, but Madertie's collection was presumably available from the time the Deed of Mortification was proved in 1696) to 1968, when the library ceased to function as a lending library and became a 'historic library' visitor attraction. The library began as Lord Madertie's private collection of some four hundred books, mainly works of divinity, theology, law, science, agriculture and natural history. The collection grew through the generations to encompass philosophy, geography and travel, domestic economy and conduct books, periodicals and journals, and, from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, fiction, drama and poetry. Borrowers came from a wide variety of social backgrounds, from local laird to shepherd and schoolchild. Through an analysis of the existing borrowers' records and other extant manuscript material, this chapter will discuss both the extent to which the founder's wishes were interpreted and fulfilled in the Romantic period (c.1780–1830) and the ways in which scholarship of this nature can shed light on a wider history of reading and communities. Mark Towsey has brilliantly demonstrated how close analysis of library records and other evidence in the history of reading is key to understanding the extent to which the ideals of the Scottish Enlightenment penetrated into what he calls "provincial Scotland";<sup>5</sup> in this chapter I will consider how what we now call Romanticism was experienced in one small pocket of rural Scotland.

Romanticism (like Enlightenment) is, of course, a contested term, and much recent scholarship has been devoted to disentangling the particularities of 'national' Romanticisms from an older tradition of an all-embracing European Romanticism. In 1949, for example, René Wellek could suggest that:

4 Anon, *Innerpeffray Library & Chapel: A Historical Sketch, With Some Notes on the Books of the Library*. Printed by Authority of the Governors (Crieff: David Phillips, 1916), p. 2.

5 Mark Towsey, *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment: Books and their Readers in Provincial Scotland, 1750–1820* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), p. 8 and *passim*.

If we examine the characteristics of the actual literature which called itself or was called 'romantic' all over the continent, we find throughout Europe the same conceptions of poetry and of the nature and workings of poetic imagination, the same conception of nature and its relation to man, and basically the same poetic style.<sup>6</sup>

Conversely, in 2005, Nicholas Roe wrote that "in Europe the meaning of 'Romantic' has varied from country to country", and that "no one alive at the time thought of their age in terms of 'Romanticism'".<sup>7</sup> Ian Duncan, Murray Pittock, Claire Connelly, Jim Kelly and others have lately foregrounded the notions of "Scottish Romanticism" and "Irish Romanticism",<sup>8</sup> while Andrew Hemingway and Alan Wallach have focussed on the transatlantic dimensions of Romanticism, placing such writers as Emerson, Thoreau and Dickinson within this context.<sup>9</sup> Scholars such as Anne K. Mellor, Adriana Craciun, and, more recently, Ann Hawkins, Devoney Looser and others have rightly pointed out the gendered nature of traditional theories of Romanticism, and have posited new definitions that attempt to take better account of the contributions of women writers.<sup>10</sup> Other writers, such as Anthony Mandal, have conclusively

6 René Wellek, 'The Concept of 'Romanticism' in Literary History 11: The Unity of European Romanticism', *Comparative Literature*, 1.2 (Spring 1949), pp. 147–72, at p. 147.

7 Nicholas Roe, 'Introduction', in *Romanticism: An Oxford Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 1–12, at pp. 1 and 3.

8 For a discussion of the definition of Scottish Romanticism, see Murray Pittock's introduction to *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Romanticism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), pp. 1–12, and Leith Davis, Ian Duncan and Janet Sorenson (eds.), *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), *passim*; see also Pittock, *Scottish and Irish Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), *passim*, for a discussion of both Scottish and Irish Romanticism, and Claire Connelly, 'Irish Romanticism, 1800–1830', in *Cambridge History of Irish Literature, Volume 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 407–48.

9 Andrew Hemingway and Alan Wallach (eds.), *Transatlantic Romanticism: British and American Art and Literature, 1790–1860* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015).

10 See, for example, Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (New York & London: Routledge, 1993) and *Mothers of the Nation: Women's Political Writing, 1780–1800* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000) and Anne K. Mellor (ed.), *Romanticism and Feminism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988); see also Adriana Craciun, 'Romantic Poetry, Gender, Sexuality', in James Chandler and Maureen McLane (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to Romantic Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 155–77 and *British Women Writers and the French Revolution: Citizens of the World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). See also Ann Hawkins, *Romantic Women Writers Reviewed*, 6 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012), and Devoney Looser (ed.) *The Cambridge*

proven the importance of expanding our understanding of the Romantic canon to take account of forms other than poetry, in particular the novel.<sup>11</sup> And some of the best recent scholarship has highlighted the importance of the growth of the periodical press at this time.<sup>12</sup> Even the 'characteristics' that Wellek could take for granted have come under review, and proponents of a revised Romanticism argue that these need to be radically amended based on the scholarship above. (Broadly speaking, these characteristics are the features also identified by M.H. Abrams in his now classic studies of Romantic literature, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953) and *Natural Supernaturalism* (1971) – that is, an emphasis on innovation in the form and style of poetry, the concept of writing as organic, rather than artificial, a focus on the relationship between the external world, as represented usually by natural landscape, and the author's mind, a turn towards the lyric mode, a tendency towards political radicalism and revolution, and a belief in the importance of the faculty of the imagination.)

However, although minor wrangles have occurred over the exact periodisation of Romanticism, a broad consensus exists over its basic historical period. Accepting, therefore, that any use of the terms 'Romantic' and 'Romanticism' should proceed with due caution, for the purposes of this chapter I intend to take a strictly period-based definition, and to consider 'Romantic' writing to be texts written or first published within the historical period 1780 to 1830. My first aim will be to establish whether Innerpeffray's borrowers were able to access such texts, and whether they did in fact do so. My second will be to consider what these findings tell us about the role of this library in the local community.

In *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (2004), William St Clair poses the hypothesis that most readers of the Romantic period did not read the new works of literature which tumbled from the presses in this rich era of composition. Instead, the copyright act of 1774 effectively created and perpetuated what St Clair calls an "old canon" of literature as publishers took the opportunity to reprint a series of older works that were now out of copyright. These reprints were cheap and numerous, while new books were expensive. Hence, St Clair suggests, the vast majority of labouring- and middle-class readers

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*Companion to Women's Writing in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

- 11 See Anthony Mandal, *Jane Austen and the Popular Novel: The Determined Author* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), in particular the chapters on 'Fiction and the Literary Marketplace' (pp. 3–40) and 'The Business of Novel-Writing' (pp. 168–202), and his chapter on 'Fiction', in (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Women's Writing in the Romantic Period*, pp. 16–31.
- 12 See, for example, Kim Wheatly (ed.), *Romantic Periodicals and Print Culture* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 2003) and Mark Schoenfield, *British Periodicals and Romantic Identity: The Literary Lower Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

were exposed not to the works of Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, Shelley, Keats or even Byron or Scott, but to those of the writers of the previous centuries: Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, Johnson, Sterne, Milton, Cowper, Pope, Gray, Shakespeare, Chaucer and so on.<sup>13</sup> From his evidence, he argues that Romantic-period readers were hence saturated in the mind-set and ideals of “old canon” literature, and that “there is indeed a recognisable correspondence between historic reading patterns and consequent mentalities [...] For example, the persistence of rural and religious constructions of Englishness far into the urbanised industrialised age was greatly assisted by the entrenchment of the reading of seventeenth and eighteenth-century literary texts in schoolrooms”.<sup>14</sup> St Clair advocates what he calls a “systems approach”: “a scrutiny of the consolidated empirical records of historic reading” which shows “properties of the whole, rather than properties of its components parts”.<sup>15</sup>

St Clair’s is an ambitious method, which has its strengths – particularly in starting to identify patterns and models, however partial and provisional – but in its deliberate attempts to generalise, it tends to lose sight of key details (the “properties of its component parts”), without which, I would argue, the larger narrative ceases to be meaningful. In this chapter, therefore, I wish to take a different methodological and disciplinary approach, remaining focussed on a single case study and using archival records to elucidate my findings. The archival records of small libraries are an under-utilised but valuable resource in the history of reading. While the evidence in this chapter bears out St Clair’s argument that readers of the labouring classes in the parish of Innerpeffray did not read the new works of Romantic literature, the archival records prove conclusively first that they did not read seventeenth- and eighteenth-century literary texts in the Innerpeffray schoolroom either, and secondly that this was not the result of the “tranching down” effects identified by St Clair as the result of publishers’ monopolistic practices. Instead, the records remind us forcibly of the role of chance in histories of reading, and the extent to which events far outside their control could and did dictate the reading ‘choices’ of labouring-class readers. Access to Innerpeffray’s collections was controlled and circumscribed by those in charge of the library, and when those authority figures were dilatory, negligent or actively hostile, there was very little that the users of the library could do about it. In addition, they had no input into the

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13 For a full account of the “old canon”, see William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 122–39, and for a full list of the authors of the “old canon”, see pp. 128–35, and Appendix 6.

14 St Clair, *Reading Nation*, p. 433.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 6 and p. 6 note 8.



works accessioned by the library. Practice at Innerpeffray therefore contrasted with what David Allan has identified as a key benefit to readers in this period: "in granting unprecedented access to large numbers of books, and even, in many cases, conferring the chance to play a role in choosing new acquisitions, libraries allowed readers themselves to help shape taste and define the emerging canon".<sup>16</sup> Although there may have been some informal ways for borrowers to request the purchase of particular works, there was no formal mechanism by which they might have done so, and no records of borrowers' purchasing requests exist before the late nineteenth century.

Much excellent work has, of course, already been done on the habits and practices of labouring-class readers.<sup>17</sup> Research on Innerpeffray Library's borrowers also exists, albeit within a fairly limited compass.<sup>18</sup> All such scholarship emphasises the difficulty of working with the available evidence – as Ginzburg puts it, "the scarcity of evidence about the behavior and attitudes of the subordinate classes of the past is certainly the major, though not the only, obstacle faced by research of this type"<sup>19</sup> – and I have argued elsewhere for the importance of taking seriously the various difficulties involved in interpreting scarce, patchy, unrepresentative and often anecdotal evidence, as well as of remembering that the evidence of intended reading is assuredly not evidence for actual reading.<sup>20</sup> Innerpeffray Library's borrowers' registers are certainly

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- 16 David Allan, 'Circulation', in Peter Garside and Karen O'Brien (eds.) *The Oxford History of the Novel in English, Volume 2: English and British Fiction, 1750–1820* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 53–69, at p. 58.
  - 17 Richard Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800–1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957); David Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom* (London: Europa, 1981); Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980); Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).
  - 18 See Paul Kaufman, *Libraries and their Users: Collected Papers in Library History* (London: Library Association, 1969) and 'A Unique Record of a People's Reading', *Libri*, 14.3 (1964–1965), pp. 227–42; George Chamier, *The First Light: The Story of Innerpeffray Library* (Crieff: Published by the Library of Innerpeffray, 2009), pp. 92–96; Towsey, *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment*, pp. 136–42; Cairns Mason, *Lending Libraries in the Spread of Enlightenment Thinking: Two Scottish Case Studies, Innerpeffray Library, Crieff and the Monkland Friendly Society, Dunscore* (Braco: DOICA, 2006).
  - 19 Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*, p. xiii.
  - 20 See, for example, Katie Halsey, 'Reading the Evidence of Reading', *Popular Narrative Media*, 1.2 (2008), pp. 123–37, Katie Halsey and Rosalind Crone, 'On Collecting, Cataloguing and Collating the Evidence of Reading: The 'RED' movement' and its Implications for Digital Scholarship', in Toni Weller (ed.), *History in the Digital Age* (London: Routledge, 2012),

therefore problematic in one sense, as we have no evidence that those who borrowed from the library ever did read the books they took away with them, but various factors would suggest that the effort expended in borrowing the books would have been entirely disproportionate if the borrowers did not intend to read them. On average, Innerpeffray's borrowers in the Romantic period travelled for about ten miles (round trip), usually on foot, and often in the winter through the Scottish climate of cold, rain, mud, and frequent snow, to borrow books. Although borrowing itself was free, they bound themselves to pay fines for non-return or damage of the books that could represent a substantial proportion of many borrowers' weekly income, and they carried away books that were physically heavy (the collection at this date was largely folio and quarto volumes) to homes that were deficient in space, quiet and the amenities for reading that we take for granted in the twenty-first century. Under such circumstances, the balance of probability is that the borrowers did in fact read the books, or at least some portion of them.

The registers are also, of course, unrepresentative, in the sense that they represent only a tiny proportion of the population. Between 1780 and 1830, approximately 1,000 names are recorded in the registers.<sup>21</sup> The population of Perthshire (the local region) in 1801 was approximately 126,000, the population of Scotland was approximately 1,610,000, and in England and Wales, a population of 7.5 million in 1780 rose to 18.5 million by 1850. As discussed above, the reading choices of the borrowers are also unrepresentative, dictated by the quirks of the collection, which reflected the tastes of the founder and his successors, rather than necessarily those books that the borrowers would have most liked to read.

### Access to Romantic Texts

Here we return to my first research question: what access did Innerpeffray's borrowers in fact have to Romantic texts, or indeed, to those of the "old canon"? It is certainly true that the vast majority of the books listed in Innerpeffray's

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pp. 95–110, and Katie Halsey, Rosalind Crone and Shafquat Towheed, 'Examining the Evidence of Reading: Three Examples from the Reading Experience Database, 1450–1945', in Bonnie Gunzenhauser (ed.), *Reading in History: New Methodologies from the Anglo-American Tradition* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2010), pp. 29–45.

21 An exact count is impossible because of the vagaries of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century spelling of names, and hence difficulties of disambiguating borrowers with the same or similar names (e.g. James Anderson, Jas. Anderson, J. Anderson, Jas. Anders.) This difficulty is compounded by the practice of naming sons after fathers and grandfathers.

1813 manuscript catalogue date from the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, although there is also a significant minority of sixteenth-century books. Very few Romantic-era texts appear in the catalogue. However, almost equally few of the works in the catalogue are those identified by St Clair as the "old canon". The founder's original collection of four hundred volumes certainly were not "old canon" works, but even those books added to the collection by his successors (most notably Robert Hay Drummond, Archbishop of York, who left some two thousand of his own books to the library in 1776, and oversaw the purchase of many more between 1744 and 1765) seem to have been chosen more for Classical and theological learning, and practical utility, than with an eye to giving the library's users access to canonical works of British literature. A memorandum of "books proposed to be bought into the Library at Innerpefferay, as occasion offers" from May 1744 shows that emphasis was placed on buying the most recent works in subjects such as "Divinity, Classicks, History" and a footnote adds "a list of Mathematical books to be got from some Professor".<sup>22</sup> The collection represented by the 1813 catalogue remains heavily weighted towards divinity, law, Ancient and Modern history, Classics, theology, agriculture and husbandry, and philosophy.

Books listed in the 1813 catalogue written or published within our period (1780 to 1830) are very few; almost all date from the 1780s, and none are by what we would now think of as mainstream Romantic authors. The first entry is Jacob Bryant's *Observations Upon the Poems of Thomas Rowley: in which the Authenticity of those Poems is Ascertained* (1781), a disquisition on the Chatterton controversy, interesting here in that no copy of Chatterton's poems was (or is) present in the library – familiarity with contemporary debates was therefore perhaps considered to be more important than reading the poems themselves. The catalogue next lists the four volumes of William Russell's *History of Modern Europe* (1782), the *Decisions of the Court of Session 1752 to 1768* (1780), Hugo Arnot's *A Collection and Abridgement of Celebrated Criminal Trials in Scotland* (1785), William Lothian's *History of the Netherlands* (1780), the Comte de Buffon's celebrated *Natural History* in eight volumes (1780; this was a new edition of an older work), John Smith's *Gallic Antiquities* (1780), a work identified in the catalogue as 'Stewart's Queen Mary Vols. 2 (1783)', which is almost certainly Gilbert Stuart's *The History of Scotland, from the Establishment of the Reformation, till the Death of Queen Mary* (1783), Alexander Cunningham's *History of Great Britain* (1787), William Marshall's *The Rural Economy of Gloucestershire* [sic] (1789), and his *Rural Economy of the Midland Counties* (1790), *The Works of the Right Reverend Thomas Newton* (1787), Thomas Sinclair's *Observations on the Scottish Dialect* (1782), *The London Mercury* of 1781, Jacques de Villamont's *Les*

22 11, Hay Drummond MS 1744/001, 'Note of Books Proposed to be Brought into the Library'.

*Voyages du Seigneur de Villamont* (1786), a new (1801) edition of John Flavel's *Divine Conduct; or, The Mystery of Providence* (first published 1678), eighty-two volumes of the *Monthly Review* (up to 1786), forty-eight volumes of the *Scots Magazine* (up to 1785), three volumes of Isaac Newton's *Works* (1782), Dr Ducarel's *History of the Palace of Lambeth* (1785), and Goldsmith's *Roman History* in two volumes (1785). Added in another hand at the end of the 1813 catalogue is the entry: "Nicolson's Christian's Refuge – Donation from the author (1827)" (full title *The Christian's refuge under the shadow of Christ: being an illustration of the nature of that rest, protection, and support which the Christian enjoys by virtue of his union with the Saviour*). William Nicolson was a "preacher of the Gospel" as the frontispiece of his book proclaims, in nearby Muthill, just four miles from Innerpeffray. Donations of books, such as Nicolson's, played an important role in the expansion of Innerpeffray's collections in the eighteenth century and Romantic period. While the trustees did periodically think seriously about the gaps in the collection (as evidenced by the 1744 Memorandum and the Mortification Book, the Minutes of the meetings of the board of trustees, which incorporated the yearly Accounts,), more commonly Madertie's desire that the collection should be augmented by his successors was honoured in the breach, and accessions throughout the period under consideration were patchy and haphazard, largely dependent on the goodwill and largesse (or otherwise) of neighbouring 'great families'.

Although these do not appear in the 1813 catalogue, for reasons that remain unclear, evidence in the Borrowers' Registers also shows that the library held the following books written or published in the period: Lord Monboddo's *Of the Origin and Progress of Language* (1792), a 1790 Berlin edition of Plato's *Dialogues IV*, a later edition of Buffon's *Natural History* (in forty volumes; 1785/7), Thomas Chalmers's *The Evidence and Authority of the Christian Revelation* (1818), another work by William Marshall, his *Rural Economy of Norfolk* (1787), and some volumes of the *Critical Review*. What all this evidence suggests is a simultaneous determination to keep the collection current (hence the *Monthly* and *Critical Reviews* and *Scots Magazine*, along with the work on the Chatterton controversy) with a refusal to succumb to literary fashions. New and newly-republished works of science (Buffon, Isaac Newton) and history (Russell, Lothian, Stuart, Ducarel, Goldsmith) take priority, and an interest in the law is also evident. The acquisitions of the 1780s suggest an accessions policy of a cash-strapped institution focussed on practical and useful knowledge, not on what we would now call Literature.

The revolutionary and counter-revolutionary political and philosophical works of the 1790s, by Thomas Paine, Edmund Burke and others, the great poetic movement begun by Wordsworth and Coleridge with the *Lyrical Ballads*

in 1798, the surge in women's writing of the 1780s to 1810s, the huge popularity of the Gothic novel, even the upsurge in conduct books and works of spiritual self-help in the wake of the French Revolution, simply went unnoticed in Innerpeffray's collections. It seems improbable that even the most isolated of rural readers, or the most unpolitical of trustees, could have remained ignorant of the events unfolding across the Channel, even if they were unaware of literary movements taking place. Why, then, should the library's collections so dramatically fail to reflect world events at this point?

To find an answer we must turn, not to questions of the economics of production, as St Clair's systems approach might, but instead to the library's archives. The evidence is patchy, but certain facts nevertheless come to light, which once again remind us of the problems faced by labouring-class readers who were dependent on others for their access to reading matter. After the death of Hay Drummond in 1776, Madertie's heirs and the other trustees of the library seem to have become less interested in the library, and money that should have been dedicated to the library to have been used for other purposes. The archival record tells us little beyond the names of the Keepers of Books (William Dow (c. 1763–c.99), James Fulton (1807–20), Widow Fulton (1821), and Ebenezer Reid (1822–37)), and it is impossible to know precisely who was in charge of book acquisitions at this time. It is clear, however, that towards the end of the period under consideration in this chapter, considerable dissatisfaction with the library was felt by the local community, some of whom seem to have been refused entry to the collection. Among the uncatalogued manuscript materials at Innerpeffray, there is a copy of "The Petition of Wm. Young, 1823", to the Sheriff of Perthshire, in which Young complains that he had been "arbitrarily ... expel[ed] from the enjoyment of his right" to enjoy the "positive advantages" of the use of the library, by the "distinct power of a man of rank". The Petition further claims: "The Library in question is the property of students and others, instituted chiefly to obviate the many hardships above described [these are the want of books, or of proper books, to enable working-class students to receive proper instruction], incident to a great body of the most meritorious students".<sup>23</sup> We might note here the language of this petition, in which we see a strong sense that the library belonged to its *users*, not to its Proprietor. Young speaks of his "right" to use the library, and the library as the "property of students and others". These claims of "right" and "property" are important, and will be further explored below.

In strict legal terms, of course, the library did not belong to the students or its users, but in 1825, the Proprietor of the library, Thomas, 11th Earl of Kinnoull,

23 1L, Miscellaneous MS 1823/001, 'The Petition of Wm. Young, 1823'.

was anxious enough about local opinion to take legal advice to ascertain the extent of his legal and financial responsibilities, and to try to find out who had the right to hold him to account for moneys owing to the library. The “Memorial for the Right Honorable the Earl of Kinnoull for the opinion of Counsel regarding the Library of Innerpeffray” outlines the library’s financial problems, brought about by the non-payment of interest on the rents of the lands dedicated for the purpose of providing an income for the library. It also demonstrates the difficulties with the heirs of the original trustees who should have been sitting on the board of trustees, but who were unwilling to act in any way, and seeks advice on whether or not members of the local community are entitled “to call the Memorialist [i.e. Kinnoull] to account for the funds in his hands”.<sup>24</sup>

In addition, Kinnoull sought advice as to whether the long practice (“upwards of sixty years”) of allowing members of the community to use the library conferred on them any legal rights.<sup>25</sup> It seems that Kinnoull sincerely wished to improve the library’s management, since he further asks whether he would be “justified in appropriating the said funds according to his own discretion towards bettering & augmenting the Library; or in increasing the Salary of the School master; adding to the premises or in adopting any other measure which in his own discretion he may consider for the ultimate benefit of the establishment” without reference to the absent (and non-functioning) other trustees. Tellingly, he also asks: “Would the Memorialist be justified in turning out the present incumbent [who was acting as both Schoolmaster and Librarian]. It is understood he is quite unfit”.<sup>26</sup> The “present incumbent” was Ebenezer Reid (in post 1822–37).

Counsel’s advice, contained in the “Opinion by Sir James Moncrieff On Memorial for Lord Kinnoull [*sic*]” was that “the inhabitants of the parish” would be held to have a legal interest in the running of the library, and hence that “those to whom the direction of it [the parish] is committed” would be entitled to call Kinnoull to account for any missing funds that should have been used for the purposes of buying books or paying the Librarian or Schoolmaster’s salaries.<sup>27</sup> He further advised that Kinnoull could proceed without the consent of the absent trustees, as long as he had laid a formal complaint against them, but advised proceeding with great caution in the matter of sacking the

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24 ‘Memorial’, p. 12.

25 ‘Memorial’, pp. 12–13.

26 ‘Memorial’, p. 17.

27 11, Miscellaneous MS/003, ‘Opinion by Sir James Moncrieff On Memorial for Lord Kinnoull’, p. 2.

Schoolmaster. What then happened remains obscure, although it is known that Reid remained in post until 1837. Between 1837 and 1854, it is believed that there was no Keeper of Books, or only temporary incumbents, as the keys were held by the Grounds Officer (gardener) in the absence of a Keeper.<sup>28</sup> And a note written in 1855 suggests that matters did not improve significantly until the dynamic James Christie was appointed in 1854/5. Volume II of the 1855 Catalogue contains a statement as follows in a currently-unidentified nineteenth-century hand (possibly that of Christie):

The management by the Trust was for a long period unsatisfactory .... But since 1854 upwards of 450 of the old volumes have been rebound since the same times and above 300 new works added including the works of Scott, Wordsworth, some of Irving's texts, mostly of a class more suited to the general intelligence of the district than formerly.<sup>29</sup>

What this suggests is that, for a long time, those charged with the financial management of the library and hence its acquisition of books, were simply not fulfilling their duties. The comment above demonstrates that once an effective Keeper of Books was appointed, attempts were made to fill in perceived gaps in the collection. Thus at least some of the major works of the Romantic movement, including its Transatlantic members (those by Scott, Wordsworth and Washington Irving) were perceived as necessary to the collection, but only once that movement was effectively over.

This legal wrangle also sheds some light on the ways in which the library's role was perceived within the community. Users clearly recognised its importance as a resource for the students who borrowed from it, felt a sense of ownership over it, and a proportional sense of grievance when it was ill-managed. This sense of ownership, and of 'right' to the library should be read in its socio-political context. As a student in 1823, William Young grew up in the era immediately following the French Revolution, when discourse about the 'rights of man' formed a central part of both political and cultural life in Britain. He lived through the wars with France of 1793–1815, and experienced the repressive counter-measures against freedom of speech and freedom of assembly usually known as the Gagging Acts (1817), when the British government attempted to limit the dissemination of democratic, radical and revolutionary ideas. The question of the working man's access to education, in this political

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<sup>28</sup> Chamier, *First Light*, p. 125.

<sup>29</sup> Innerpeffray Library 1855 Catalogue. Recorded on the page for entries beginning with the letter "K".

climate, was a live one. William Young may never have read Thomas Paine's famous *Rights of Man* (1792) but there are striking similarities between the "Petition" and Paine's central emphasis on the individual's inherent and inalienable rights, juxtaposed against his criticism of aristocratic government which does not act in the best interests of the people. Young's is, in fact, a Paineite reading of the situation at Innerpefferay.

Both William Young and Kinnoull had good grounds for complaint against Ebenezer Reid, although it seems that the rot must have set in earlier than his tenure. In the period under consideration, the Library's Mortification Book demonstrates a significant dereliction of duty with regards to the buying of books which, according to the Founder's will, should have happened every year ("augmented by my successors yearly"). It is clear that this did not happen. Although the librarian's salary is duly recorded every year, along with sundry expenses such as panes of glass, door locks, shoring up the foundations of the library, whitewash and harling, building new presses, a yearly supply of coals for the use of the librarian, and similar costs, records for buying books only appear four times between 1780 and the end of the Mortification Book in 1811, after which the lack of records is entirely consistent with the narrative of neglect by the trustees. In addition, expenditure on books dramatically decreased during this period. Whereas in 1778–79, the sum of £71 1s. 6d. was expended on books, with £3 3s. on Tillotson's *Sermons* alone, in 1780, £30 13s. 3½d. was spent plus Arnot's *Criminal Trials*, listed separately for 18s. Between 1788 and 1798, only £4 14s. 7d. was spent. And then there is no mention of book buying until May 1811, when £1 10s. is recorded.

These various documents reveal a depressing story of financial woe and neglect of the library by those charged with its care. The Founder's ambition for a collection regularly augmented with new material for the benefit of its borrowers was sadly undermined in the Romantic period, because of dereliction of duty by the trustees. Perhaps because they themselves did not need to borrow materials from the library, they were unaware of its potential importance to the actual users. Or perhaps they were simply uninterested and disengaged, inheriting familial ties to the trusteeships which they found to be distasteful or irrelevant. Whatever the reasons for their failings, the result was that Innerpefferay's readers in the period 1780 to 1830 therefore had no first-hand access at all to what would now be considered mainstream Romantic material from this library (although it is at this stage of research impossible to say whether or not they found it by other means).<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, the borrowers' registers for the

30 An important caveat to this statement is, of course, that the borrowers *did* have access to both the *Monthly Review* and the *Scots Magazine*, but only up to the years 1786 and 1785 respectively. It seems that the subscription to these periodicals then lapsed. Borrowers are



period show an extremely healthy amount of borrowing activity. They may not have been borrowing Paine, Wollstonecraft, Wordsworth, Scott, Byron or Jane Austen, but readers in this corner of rural Perthshire were nonetheless making the most of the books that were available to them. Innerpeffray Library did not give them the latest books, it seems, but it still gave them something of value. We must turn now to the registers to see what they took away with them.

### Borrowing Romantic Texts

There are 4,842 records of borrowings for the period 1780–1830. Of these, only 255 were of books written or published during the Romantic period, and of course some were repeat borrowings of the same work, while some were separate borrowings of different volumes of the same work (for example, Mr Kemp of Gilmore borrowed volume one of the Revd Thomas Newton's *Works* on 30 April 1801, returning on 1 June for the second volume, and on 9 July for the third). We must omit the editions of Plato's *Dialogues* and Flavel's *Divine Conduct* published during the period from our analysis, as these were reissues of older works, as well as Buffon's *Natural History*, since, although the final volumes of this work *were* first published in the Romantic period, the majority of the work was not, and it is not usually possible to ascertain whether Innerpeffray's borrowers were borrowing the post-1780, or earlier volumes, which fall outside the period remit. When we do this, the figure for borrowings of Romantic-period books from the period is 139. This equates to approximately 2.9 percent of total borrowings 1780–1830, which is unsurprising, given the library's paucity of Romantic texts (under two percent of the collection at this point).

Stuart's *History of Scotland* was the most popular Romantic-period work, and remained so throughout the period, being borrowed twenty-five times between 1787 and 1829. In comparison to older works, however, this was a fairly negligible result – the older work of Scots history, Patrick Abercromby's *The Martial Atchievements [sic] of the Scots Nation* (1711) was borrowed twenty-three times in the same period, and Robertson's *History of Charles V* (1769) was borrowed seventy-two times. Of Romantic-era works, the *Works of the Right Reverend Thomas Newton* were borrowed sixteen times, between the dates 1801 and 1822. Smith's *Gaelic Antiquities*, a work which included "a dissertation on

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also recorded as borrowing the *Critical Review* quite extensively in the Romantic period, usually the most recent volumes. The practice of eighteenth-century reviewers of quoting extensively from the texts under review would potentially have given borrowers the possibility of seeing at least some parts of texts which were not in the library.

the authenticity of the poems of Ossian", and specimens of "ancient poems translated from the Galic [*sic*] of Ullin, Ossian, Orran, &c", also proved relatively popular, with fourteen borrowings between 1790 and 1825. Cunningham's *History of Great Britain* was slightly less popular, borrowed thirteen times, between 1791 and 1827. Arnot's *Criminal Trials* was also borrowed thirteen times between 1786 and 1812. William Russell's *History of Modern Europe* was borrowed seven times, between 1799 and 1826. Sinclair's *Observations on the Scottish Dialect* was borrowed eight times between 1790 and 1818. Monboddo's *On the Origin and Progress of Language* was issued six times, between 1803 and 1823. The work on the Chatterton controversy, *Observations on the Poems of Thomas Rowley*, was borrowed twice, in 1796 and 1806, in both cases many years after the heat of the controversy was over. The *History of the Netherlands* was borrowed four times between 1782 and 1791. Marshall's *Rural Economy of Gloucestershire* was borrowed twice and his *Rural Economy of the Midland Counties* was issued four times (twice to the same borrower, James Faichney), while his *Norfolk* was borrowed once, all in the relatively short time span of 1801–08. *The London Mercury* (in 1807), the *History and Antiquities of the Archiepiscopal Palace of Lambeth* (in 1808), and Chalmers' *Evidence and Authority of the Christian Revelation* (the only nineteenth-century text excluding the *Critical Review* borrowed in this period, published in 1818 and borrowed in 1823), were all borrowed only once. While the borrowers of this period did occasionally take out the library's few works of drama and poetry (including those of the Classical world), the genres most often borrowed were, as other scholars have noted in relation to the eighteenth-century borrowings, religious and spiritual works, followed by works of history, natural history and the *Scots Magazine*.

It is difficult to do more than speculate on what motivates these borrowings at this stage of research. There is a clear emphasis on an interest in Scottish history and Scottish culture (as evidenced by the borrowings of Abercromby, Stuart, Smith and Sinclair), which might suggest a nascent Scottish nationalism, of sorts. In particular, the frequent borrowings of Smith's *Gaelic Antiquities*, with its emphasis on the importance of the works of Ossian, lends credit to this hypothesis. On the other hand, Innerpeffray's borrowers were clearly also interested in the wider world (as shown by their borrowings of Robertson, Cunningham, Russell and Lothian). The relative popularity of Monboddo's somewhat eccentric work of historical linguistics, dealing with the languages of colonised peoples, including Carib, Eskimo, Huron, Algonquian, Peruvian and Tahitian peoples, might be a further manifestation of this desire to know more about the world outside rural Perthshire, but Monboddo is an odd choice. It is an Enlightenment text rarely found in subscription or circulating libraries where users have control over acquisitions, and was a remnant from

Hay Drummond's own collection. It probably appealed to the library's users because of Monboddo's reputation, rather than necessarily because of the work's contents, although it is also possible that Monboddo's evangelical missionary project attracted at least some of Innerpeffray's borrowers.<sup>31</sup> Arnot's *Criminal Trials* were most likely borrowed by law students reading up on precedents, while the works on rural economy have an obvious practical application in a farming community.

The wide time range between borrowings of all these books – with works published in the 1780s regularly borrowed in the 1820s – suggests that Innerpeffray's borrowers were not particularly interested in keeping up with the latest publications; indeed, it might well be that they did not even have a sense of what the latest publications were, although regular borrowings of the *Critical Review* might suggest otherwise. In addition, we very rarely see 'clusters' of borrowings of the same text, suggesting that the borrowers were relatively immune to fashions of reading, even within their own small community. Instead, the evidence strongly implies that they were willing to read works that were of an older date, and indeed that they believed those works were still useful or relevant to them. Although newer works of history (Cunningham's *History of Great Britain*, for example) were available to them, borrowings of works of history from Madertie's original collection, such as John Stow's *Chronicles of England* (1580) remained constant. Similarly, they remained loyal to older writers of theology and divinity, borrowing relatively modern collections of sermons, such as Clark's and Atterbury's of the mid eighteenth century (borrowed seventy-two and forty-one times respectively in our period), but remaining remarkably fond of Archbishop John Tillotson's early- to mid- seventeenth-century sermons (borrowed sixty-six times in the same period). The choice of Tillotson is unsurprising – Tillotson remained one of the most popular sermon writers of the eighteenth century (and was one of Jane Austen's favourites) – while Clark and Atterbury were similarly enjoyed as much for their style as for their religious messages. Conversely, the borrowers showed a marked preference for the newer works on agriculture, husbandry and natural history.<sup>32</sup> It is important to note that though excluded from the numerical analysis above, for the reasons noted, Buffon's *Natural History* was in fact the most borrowed book in the whole of the Romantic period (103 borrowings). As Mark Towsey has

31 Monboddo, an Enlightenment polymath, was probably known to Innerpeffray's borrowers primarily because of his celebrity as the solicitor in the scandalous Douglas inheritance case of 1767–9 – a *cause celebre* of the eighteenth century.

32 Nonetheless, Edward Topsell's comprehensively outdated *The History of Four-Footed Beastes* (1607) was still borrowed once in the period.

shown, these borrowers also borrowed other key texts of the Enlightenment in the years 1780 to 1820.<sup>33</sup>

It seems then, that for Innerpeffray's borrowers, the Romantic movement was happening elsewhere. For them, the great works of the Romantic period were still those of the Enlightenment and their counter-Enlightenment opponents – Buffon, Robertson, Ferguson, Hume, Kames and Beattie. The question remains as to whether these borrowers would have wished to read the literary works of Austen, Wordsworth, Byron, Scott, Shelley, Hemans, Smith, Ferrier, Burns or the many other Romantic novelists, poets and dramatists, had they been offered the opportunity to do so. Given their training and habits of borrowing primarily spiritual, philosophical or historical texts, they might have preferred the philosophical works of Hegel, Kant, Goethe, Schelling or Wordsworth and Coleridge, or the political writings of Burke, Paine and Wollstonecraft. It seems probable that the Evangelical novels of writers such as Mary Brunton and Hannah More would have appealed to the borrowers' existing habits of seeking spiritual help in written works. And the later nineteenth-century records strongly suggest that Walter Scott's historical novels, and Byron's poetry, would have found an avid readership much earlier had they been available.

Innerpeffray's Romantic-period borrowers thus encountered neither the latest works of the Romantic period, nor William St Clair's "old canon" of literature. Instead, their choices reflect both the limitations and opportunities of the collection with which they were presented. This case study suggests that the library was important to its users not as a repository of works that would allow them to keep up with the latest publications, but, as William Young suggested in his Petition in 1823, as a place where those who wished to remedy their intellectual privations could do so. Interestingly, William Young himself was not a very frequent borrower from the library, with records between 1780 and 1830 showing only three visits to the library. On 18 April 1822, Young borrowed James Dalrymple Stair's *Institutions of the Law of Scotland* (1693). On 21 December 1826, he borrowed the first volume of George Harris's translation of Justinian's *Institutes* (1761). Both of these were standard texts in the teaching of Scots law. On 4 June 1827, Young took out Samuel Johnson's *Lives of the English Poets* (1779). His anger at being excluded from the library (an exclusion that cannot, in fact, have lasted long, given the dates above) therefore seems disproportionate. It seems most probable that Young was the spokesman for a group of disgruntled students who felt that the Schoolmaster/Librarian was not fulfilling his duties correctly, some or many of whom used the library much more frequently than Young.

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33 Towsey, *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment*, pp. 139–42.

Their idea of the library as belonging to its users, not its owners, and their strong sense of grievance at having been deprived of a 'right' to access printed matter is striking. Ironically, although there is no evidence that Young or his local peers ever read Romantic works of revolutionary philosophy, such rhetoric partakes strongly of Romanticism's revolutionary impulses and beginnings, and equally strongly of that famously transatlantic document, the Declaration of Independence. Perhaps not coincidentally, the American Library Association's "Bill of Rights" also makes a very similar point: Article v states that "A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views", while their "Freedom to Read" statement asserts that free access to reading materials is a Constitutional right.<sup>34</sup> Young's Petition suggests that a borrower did not necessarily need to read the revolutionary writings of Wordsworth, Coleridge or Shelley, or even the strongly pro-democratic writing of Paine or Wollstonecraft to feel justified in asserting his rights. As Jonathan Rose has demonstrated, readers may take radical messages from the most conservative of texts, and *vice versa*.<sup>35</sup> Readers, as Michel de Certeau famously insists, are "poachers", not passive sponges.<sup>36</sup> Like their counterparts in Revolutionary America, Innerpeffray's borrowers may have absorbed radical ideas not directly from their reading, but from discussions about reading held with friends, peers and authority figures. Indeed, the very fact of access to education, once granted and now denied, was enough to turn the minds of Innerpeffray's users to thoughts of rights and duties, rank and privilege. Mismanagement of the library deprived the borrowers of Romantic books to read, but ironically it seems also to have brought them together as a community who understood and valued their right to read.

34 American Library Association, 'Library Bill of Rights', Article v, <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill> [accessed 13 January 2017], and American Library Association, 'Freedom to Read Statement', <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/statementspols/freedomreadstatement> [accessed 13 January 2017].

35 See for example, Rose, *Intellectual Life*, Chapter 4.

36 Michel de Certeau, 'Reading as Poaching', *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendal (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 165–76.



## PART 3

### *Institutionalisation and Expansion*







## From Private Devotion to “Public” Education: Northern Dissenting Academy Libraries and Their Benefactors

*Rachel Eckersley*

The concept of benefaction was a key factor in the development of libraries in Britain during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Institutional collections, scholarly libraries, mechanics’ institutes, subscription libraries and other types of community library before and after the Public Libraries Act of 1850 relied significantly on donations of books from civic-minded local gentry and members of the middle classes.<sup>1</sup> Benefaction, or charitable donation, was of particular importance to the development of English dissenting academies and their libraries. Fundamentally, subscribers to these academies (those who paid an annual fee) wished to support burgeoning dissenting communities by training increasing numbers of male students to become local ministers. Academy libraries were of critical importance to the education of these ministerial students and were supported through a combination of voluntary subscriptions, congregational collections, legacies and donations of both monies and books. As this chapter shows, dissenting academies made frequent appeals for books and, as a consequence, their libraries acted as magnets and repositories for books written by nonconformist authors owned privately by nonconformists.

Using provenance information from surviving books of the Northern Congregational College (NCC, founded in 1958), now entered into the *Dissenting Academies Online: Virtual Library System*,<sup>2</sup> and the annual reports and committee minutes of the various institutions that fed into the College, the chapter examines the movement of private books into public institutional hands,

- 1 Joanna Innes, ‘Libraries in Context: Social, Cultural and Intellectual Background’, in Giles Mandelbrote and K.A. Manley (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland, Volume 2: 1640–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 285–300.
- 2 *Dissenting Academies Online: Virtual Library System* [hereafter *Dissenting Academies Online: VLS*] <http://vls.english.qmul.ac.uk/> (consulted February 2017) is an electronic catalogue which represents the holdings and loans of selected dissenting academies in England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and is compiled from historic catalogues, shelf lists, loan registers, and surviving books from the academy libraries.

shedding light on how these academy libraries were formed and used. It investigates the use of these academy books before they entered the realm of 'public' education and questions how far academies selected the books which ended up in their libraries. Finally, it examines the extent to which benefaction drove the development of such libraries and indeed of academies themselves, asking what purposes benefaction served beyond the education of adults.

It begins by surveying the various means by which dissenters' private books and book collections made their way into the public space of dissenting academies. Rather than being simply purchased new and given to these academies, many of them had long histories of use within the dissenting community and surviving books frequently bear evidence of these complex histories. It focuses on library development at three dissenting academies – Airedale Independent College (1800–88) and Rotherham Independent College (1795–1888) in Yorkshire, and Lancashire Independent College (1843–1958) – from the 1790s until the late nineteenth century to reveal the active and passive modes of benefaction utilised by dissenters.<sup>3</sup> Such an examination can tell us not only about the growth of dissenting academy libraries, but also about the ways in which those libraries developed, the relationships established between academies and their local communities and the wider function of benefaction in dissenting circles during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

### Dissenting Academies and Their Libraries

Dissenting academies were founded in the aftermath of the Act of Uniformity (1662) to provide Protestant students who dissented from the Church of England with a higher education comparable to that available in the English universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Presbyterians, Congregationalists and Baptists all opened academies across England, the earliest of which often comprised a few students studying under a single tutor or leading minister in

3 For the history of these Northern dissenting academies, see Elaine Kaye, *For the Work of the Ministry, A History of the Northern College and Its Predecessors* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1999); Simon N. Dixon, 'William Roby's College (1803–08)', 'Leaf Square Academy (1811–13)', 'Blackburn Independent Academy (1816–43)', 'Lancashire Independent College (1843–1958)', 'Airedale Independent College (1800–88)', and 'Rotherham Independent College (1795–1888)', *Dissenting Academies Online: Database and Encyclopedia* [hereafter *Dissenting Academies Online: D&E*], June 2011, Blackburn revised October 2012, <http://dissacad.english.qmul.ac.uk>. In addition to the academy histories, the *Database and Encyclopedia* includes brief biographies of all the tutors and students at the various dissenting academies identified by a reference number (hereafter D&E ID).

his home. After the later eighteenth century dissenting academies were established as more robust institutions with several tutors, scores of students and purpose-built academic structures.<sup>4</sup>

Principally designed to prepare candidates for the ministry, some also educated lay students and in so doing fulfilled an additional function in the community. Ministers themselves were regarded as "public teachers of religion" who followed not only a course of theological study as trainees, but also a "thorough general education" comprising English language and literature, classical learning, mathematical and natural science, logic and moral philosophy.<sup>5</sup> At a time of rapid population growth and economic development in the industrial north, accompanied by periods of social distress, it was important that an "*efficient ministry*" supported expanding local congregations and dissenting communities inhabited by people of an "enlightened and inquiring age".<sup>6</sup>

The emergence of the leading dissenting academies in the North of England can be seen in the history of the forerunners of the Northern Congregational College. Two major Congregational Colleges, Lancashire Independent College and the Yorkshire United Independent College (1888–1958) would eventually amalgamate to form one institution in Manchester.<sup>7</sup> Each of those sizeable colleges, in turn, traced their origins to several earlier academies. Lancashire counted William Roby's College, Manchester (1803–08), Leaf Square Academy, Pendleton (1811–13), and Blackburn Independent Academy (1816–43) among its predecessor academies. Yorkshire enjoyed an even longer lineage which included Airedale Independent College (1800–88) and Rotherham Independent College (1795–1888).<sup>8</sup> The latter descended from James Scott's Academy at Heckmondwike (1756–83) and Samuel Walker's Academy, Northowram

4 <http://www.qmulreligionandliterature.co.uk/research/the-dissenting-academies-project/dissenting-academies/> (consulted February 2017).

5 *The Annual Report of the Independent College at Rotherham, June 29, 1859* (Sheffield: Robert Leader, 1859), p. 9.

6 *The Annual Report of the Independent College at Rotherham, June 25, 1856* (Sheffield: Robert Leader, 1856), pp. 5–6 (original emphasis).

7 Independent and Congregational are different terms for the same denomination. Dissenters known as Independents or Congregationalists benefited from the evangelical revival and established many new congregations from the late eighteenth century onwards, particularly in growing industrial areas. <http://www.qmulreligionandliterature.co.uk/research/the-dissenting-academies-project/protestant-dissent/#independents> (consulted February 2017).

8 The first was formerly named the Independent Academy at Idle (1800–26), but it is referred to in the text as Airedale College. See Simon N. Dixon, 'Airedale Independent College (1800–88)', *Dissenting Academies Online: D&E*. Prior to c.1816 Rotherham Independent College was known as Rotherham Independent Academy.

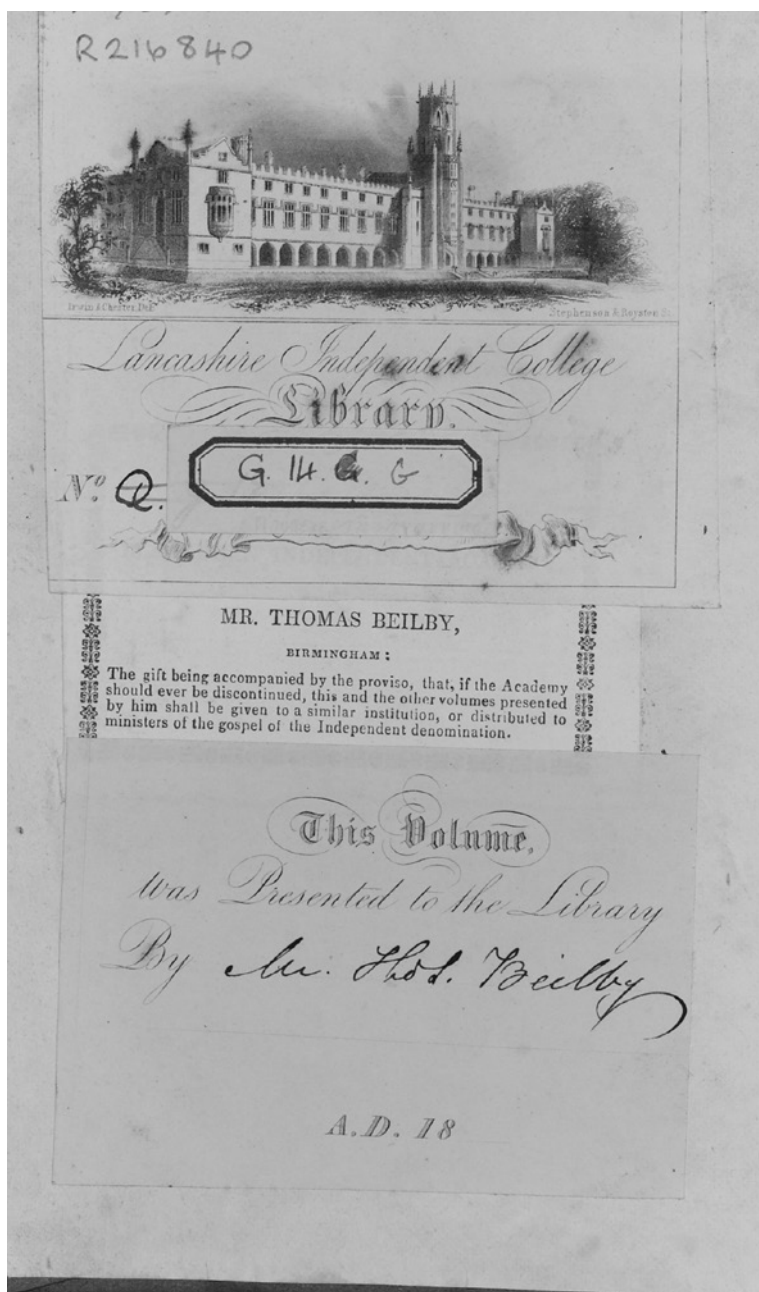


FIGURE 10.1 *Nineteenth-century pictorial bookplate of Lancashire Independent College, in The Works of the Revd Thomas Adam, late Rector of Wintringham, 3 vols, London: For Ogle, Duncan & Co, 1822, vol. 3, JRL R216840. COPYRIGHT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER.*

(1783–94). Earlier academies often dissolved when their tutors died or retired, leaving the academy's library as one of its most valuable assets. When such academies closed, the local community was most concerned about preserving its library intact and often took great pains to transfer it to a new academy.<sup>9</sup>

Over time dissenting academy library collections grew larger and acquired an assortment of old and valuable books. By the 1940s, according to an article in the *Manchester Review*, the library of the Lancashire Independent College held some 20,000 volumes, double the number of volumes recorded in the printed catalogue of 1885.<sup>10</sup> In 1975–76 the John Rylands Library, Manchester, acquired approximately 2,500 books from the library of the NCC. Bibliographical information and images of titlepages and provenance marks for these 2,500 books have now been uploaded to *Dissenting Academies Online: vls*. It should be noted that the books at Rylands represent only a fraction of the college's total holdings and as such should not be taken as representative of academy libraries, nor even of the NCC library as a whole. The NCC books were selected by Rylands primarily on the basis of textual value, with little attention paid to their provenance. They include rare foreign imprints, texts in a variety of languages (such as Hebrew, Greek, Syriac, Chaldee), and some unique examples of local printing.

In addition to surviving books, the published annual reports and manuscript minutes of the various colleges that predated the NCC also survive, detailing frequent appeals by their respective organising committees. At their annual meetings subscribers, who included ministers and lay members of Congregational chapels, gave donations of books and/or funds to purchase books, as well as monies to cover the running costs of the academies. Supporters in Lancashire, particularly the city of Manchester; in Yorkshire, particularly in the towns and villages of the West Riding; and in London all donated books and funds.<sup>11</sup> The congregations at Queen Street, Sheffield, and Horton Lane Chapel, College Chapel, and Salem Chapel in Bradford were particularly generous and

9 See 'Northern Congregational College, *Dissenting Academies Online: vls, History* <http://vls.english.qmul.ac.uk/cgi-bin/koha/opac-guide.pl?chapter=1#ncc> (consulted February 2017).

10 F.Y. Abel and W.G. Robinson, 'Lancashire Independent College and Its Library', *Manchester Review*, 4 (1945–47), p. 356. 10,580 volumes were recorded in the printed catalogue of 1885, which equates to around 4,800 titles. See *Catalogue of the Library of the Lancashire Independent College, Manchester* (Manchester: Alexander Thomson, 1885).

11 This pattern of local and metropolitan benefaction has been found in dissenting academies in other parts of Great Britain. See Kyle Roberts, "I have hitherto been entirely upon the borrowing hand": The Acquisition and Circulation of Books in Early Eighteenth-Century Dissenting Academies', in Frank Felsenstein and James J. Connolly (eds.), *Print Culture Histories Beyond the Metropolis* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), pp. 86–87.

active friends of the academies at Rotherham and Airedale. At various times individuals instigated fundraising appeals on behalf of the academy libraries; in 1852 the Revd Jonathan Glyde (1808–54) led an appeal to raise at least £200 for the library at Airedale.<sup>12</sup> The evidence preserved in these annual reports and minutes helps fill in the gaps in the history of benefaction, especially where the original books have not survived.<sup>13</sup>

Unlike other academy libraries included in *Dissenting Academies Online: VLS*, there are no historic borrower records for the NCC or its predecessors, which leaves us reliant on the curriculum and examination information contained in the annual reports for insights into the potential use students made of these books. The surviving NCC books do, however, have extensive marks of previous ownership and use: bookplates, inscriptions and annotations. It is this material evidence, alongside contextual information from printed reports and manuscript minutes, which allows us to study the development of academy libraries and, moreover, to examine the role played by benefaction in this development.

### Private Books for Public Use

In early dissenting academies, tutors, many of them local ministers, made their personal libraries available to their students. During his thirty-four years overseeing Airedale College at Idle, the influential minister and tutor William Vint (1768–1834) shared his collection of books with his students, thereby augmenting the academy's library.<sup>14</sup> This perpetuated a practice begun in 1794 when students from the recently defunct academy at Northowram transferred to Idle to be taught by Vint as a temporary measure.<sup>15</sup> The patronage of a London

12 For Jonathan Glyde, see Charles Surman's biographical card index of Congregational ministers, Surman Index Online <http://surman.english.qmul.ac.uk/> (consulted February 2017; hereafter Surman) Surman ID: 11270 and D&E ID: 4277.

13 Annual reports, minutes and accounts for Airedale, Blackburn, Lancashire, and Rotherham Colleges are held at The John Rylands Library, Manchester (hereafter Rylands) as part of the Northern Congregational College Archives. These archives, together with the surviving books, are the main sources for this chapter. A complete set of minutes for Airedale and Rotherham survive.

14 Simon N. Dixon, 'Vint, William (1768–1834)', *Dissenting Academies Online: D&E* (June 2011); see also D&E ID: 995.

15 J. Horsfall Turner, *Nonconformity in Idle with the History of Airedale College* (Bradford: T. Bear, 1876), p. 121; *Minutes of the General Meeting [of Rotherham Independent Academy] Held this Day at the Pack-horse, Huddersfield, 21 October 1795* (Huddersfield, 1795), p. 2.

dissenter in 1800 allowed Vint formally to begin training students at Idle for the ministry and in total, over eighty were educated there during Vint's tenure.<sup>16</sup> This was not the only example of a private library being used or shared by a wider community, and underpinning an institutional library. At Blackburn from 1816 onwards students had access to the collection of books owned by Joseph Fletcher (1784–1843), the theological tutor, as well as the share in the Blackburn Subscription Library owned by Roger Cunliffe, the college's first treasurer.<sup>17</sup>

Lay supporters of dissenting academies also donated books from their own libraries and those of their families. Thomas Beilby (1781–1860) of Birmingham donated around 150 volumes to Blackburn Independent College from his own library in 1837–38. Beilby was from a family of skilled glassworkers and enamellers that included his father Thomas, uncles Richard, Ralph, and William, and aunt Mary, originally from Durham where their father, William, had been a goldsmith.<sup>18</sup> The second edition of Robert Spearman's *An Enquiry after Philosophy and Theology* (1757) was previously owned by other family members, J. Beilby and William Beilby, probably Thomas's mother and brother. An inscription therein reads "J. Beilby", and underneath in a different hand, "Given by her son William to her".<sup>19</sup> This tradition of sharing books not just within families but within local dissenting communities was key to the development of academy libraries and academies themselves.

Donated books could thus contain long histories of ownership among dissenters. In 1834 the Airedale committee gave thanks to George Bennet (1773–1841) for "a chest of books – containing John Taylor's *Hebrew concordance*, James Usher's *A Body of divinity* and 20 other volumes".<sup>20</sup> Bennet had travelled to the South Sea Islands, Australia, China, India, Madagascar and South Africa with

16 Simon N. Dixon, 'Vint, William (1768–1834)', *Dissenting Academies Online: D&E*.

17 Simon N. Dixon, 'Blackburn Independent Academy (1816–43)', *Dissenting Academies Online: D&E*. Blackburn Subscription Library was founded in 1809 at the Independent Chapel, Blackburn, by Congregationalists. It seems likely that the Roger Cunliffe (d. 1822) referred to is the Blackburn calico manufacturer and business partner of William Brooks (1762–1846), who together founded the Cunliffe, Brooks & Co. Bank in Blackburn in 1792, acquired by Lloyds Banking Group in 1900.

18 Alexander Koller, 'Beilby family (per. c.1755–1819)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/73669>, accessed 12 May 2015]; see also mention of Thomas Beilby in *The Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle*, volume VIII, new series (London: Frederick Westley and A.H. Davis, 1830), p. 251.

19 VLS record 32122 Rylands accession number R216743. It may be I. Beilby (possibly Isabel).

20 *Report of Airedale Independent College, 1833–34* (Bradford: Wm. Byles, 1834), p. 11.

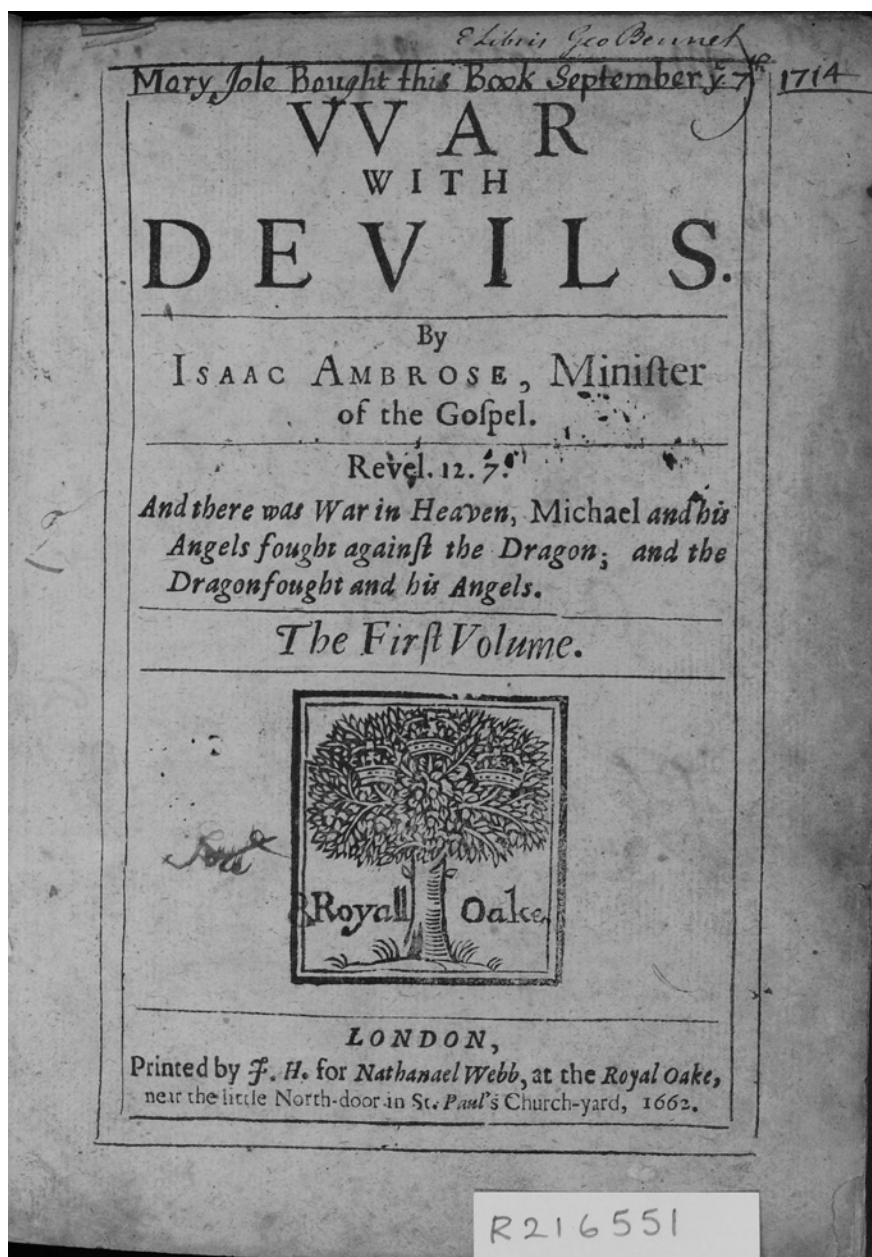


FIGURE 10.2 Title Page of Isaac Ambrose, *War with Devils*, London: J.H., 1662, vol. 1 JRL R216551.

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the Revd Daniel Tyerman (1773–1828) between 1821 and 1829 on behalf of the London Missionary Society, whose members were largely Congregationalists.<sup>21</sup> These were not the only books given by Bennet. His inscription – “George Bennet to the Airedale College Dec. 26 1831” – can be found in a copy of *War with Devils* by Isaac Ambrose (1604–64), published in London in 1662, the year when Ambrose refused to submit to Anglican authority as required by the Act of Uniformity (Figure 10.2).<sup>22</sup> Four other inscriptions, three by women, pre-date Bennet’s ownership. An eighteenth-century inscription on the titlepage reads: “Mary Jole Bought this Book September Ye. 7th 1714”. Other manuscript inscriptions read as follows: “Miriam De Lellers [Rd] price 3–6”; “Jean Holladay [partially obliterated] Her book April 25 1702[?]; Christ shall give Ye Light, London 1702/3”, and finally “Jonas Dennis 1724”. With the exception of Bennet, it has proved impossible to identify these former owners further, but the Ambrose, with its multi-layered early provenance, represents a typical example of the mobility and longevity of dissenting books in private ownership.

Bennet, like other dissenters, supported multiple regional academies through donations of books and funds. At least ten books bearing his inscription survive in the NCC collection and are recorded in *Dissenting Academies Online: VLS*, as well as two books authored by him and Daniel Tyerman.<sup>23</sup> These inscriptions show that he gifted books not only to Airedale College, but also (in 1832) to the academy at Rotherham, which merged with Airedale to form Yorkshire United Independent College in 1888, reuniting Bennet’s books. Bennet also donated his time and effort to dissenting academies. In 1804 he was one of those “proposed and solicited” by the committee formed to manage the business of Rotherham to assist their ministers in obtaining subscriptions in their neighbourhood, in Bennet’s case Sheffield. The committee comprised twelve ministers and twelve laymen. Bennet himself was a subscriber to the academy via Queen Street Chapel, Sheffield, and Vice-Treasurer of the academy.

21 Andrew Porter, ‘Founders of the London Missionary Society (act. 1795)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford University Press. [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/theme/42118>, accessed 19 January 2017]. Several letters written by Bennet dating from the early decades of the nineteenth century are contained in archives of the LMS. For example, LMS Archives, The School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, Letter of George Bennet to Revd George Burder (1752–1832, Secretary of the LMS), Missionary Rooms, Old Jewry 17 August 1820.

22 See N.H. Keeble, *The Restoration: England in the 1660s* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 117–20 for the Act and its effects.

23 *Journal of Voyages and Travels*, 2 vols. (London: F. Westley and A.H. Davis, 1831); *Voyages and Travels round the World* (London: John Snow, 1840; first published 1831).

Crucially, in 1841 he left a legacy of £100 at a time when collections from congregations had not been procured and the academy was in debt.<sup>24</sup>

Surviving evidence suggests that private library collections also circulated broadly among members of the dissenting community before they were donated to academies. Books from the private libraries of two ministers, Samuel De La Rose (d.1727) and Robert Kelsall (1697–1772), eventually made their way into the Lancashire Independent Academy library. De La Rose was a student at Thomas Dixon's Whitehaven Academy in Cumberland, and also minister at Stockport for a brief period in 1718–22.<sup>25</sup> Kelsall succeeded Samuel's brother, John De La Rose (1714/15–25), as minister at Nether Chapel, Sheffield, and from 1731 until his death in 1772 he was minister at Bradwell with Great Hucklow in Derbyshire. He inherited the books left by De La Rose at Nether and his own library was extensive.<sup>26</sup> In 1843 the brothers the Revd Thomas Shaw Ashton (born c.1809), Dr James Ashton (born c. 1811) and William Henry Ashton (born c.1813), all of Stockport, Cheshire, gifted 400 volumes from the library of their late father, the Revd Solomon Ashton (1774–1836), to the library of the Lancashire Independent College on its foundation. In turn, this donation contained the remnants of the private libraries of De La Rose and Kelsall.<sup>27</sup>

To add to this already convoluted picture, a copy of *Vindiciae Legis: or, vindication of the morall law and the covenants* by Anthony Burgess (1646) previously owned by De la Rose and Kelsall made its way to Lancashire Independent College by another route.<sup>28</sup> It was owned first by John Firth, who marked it "John Firth's Booke pret: 2s-4d Decemb 24th 1647", then by De La Rose and later by Kelsall. According to an inscription, in 1809 it was owned by Lydia Harman, before being presented to the Lancashire Independent College by P. Latham of Wigan in 1843, as part of a larger donation of books. Provincial Derbyshire had few booksellers, and those, like Kelsall, acquiring books of any kind had only a small selection to choose from, most of which were secondhand. Kelsall's

24 *The Annual Report of the Independent College at Rotherham from Midsummer 1841 to Midsummer 1842* (Sheffield: George Crookes, 1842), p. 8.

25 Thomas Dixon's Academy, Whitehaven and Bolton (c.1705–c.1729) see *Dissenting Academies Online: D&E*, Academy ID: 168.

26 See Ed Potten, 'The Libraries of Robert Kelsall, Samuel De La Rose, and William Whitaker', forthcoming.

27 Samuel De La Rose Surman ID: 23456 and Robert Kelsall Surman ID: 31007. There are ninety-nine titles previously owned by Kelsall in the NCC collection and currently recorded in *Dissenting Academies Online: VLS*.

28 VLS record 33503 Rylands number R217096.

collection was unusual and large, and books from his library continued to circulate in the north for decades, ultimately making their way to Lancashire Independent College through more than one benevolent act.

Sometimes private library collections were deposited wholesale in another public, or semi-public, institution before they were given to the local dissenting academy. William Whitaker (1695–1776) of Yorkshire bequeathed his books, around 300 titles, to the congregation of the Old Meeting, Scarborough, where he served as minister from 1726 until 1773. The record of his benevolence could not be clearer in its purpose:

Be it known by these present that the books contained in the following catalogue are given to the trustees of the place of worship of the Protestant Dissenters commonly called Presbyterians in Scarborough for the use & benefit of that Christian society & of the ministers that may be my successors there & this donation to take place a month after my decease as witness my hand this [3rd?] day of October 1774. Wm Whitaker.<sup>29</sup>

The fact that Whitaker's books were later deposited at Yorkshire United Independent College provides strong evidence that benefactors regarded academies as publicly-focused institutions within dissenting communities. Dissenters were concerned about the perpetuation of academy collections to which they gave their prized books and libraries, not least because the financial situation of many academies was precarious. Returning to the example of Thomas Beilby, the copy of *The Works of Thomas Adam* (1822) that he donated to Lancashire Independent College contains a book label which succinctly summarises his motivation in making this benefaction (Figure 10.1): "if the Academy should ever be discontinued, this and the other volumes presented by him shall be given to a similar institution, or distributed to ministers of the gospel of the Independent denomination". The copy remains today in an institutional collection, albeit a secular one.<sup>30</sup>

29 National Archives RG 4/2754, list of books bequeathed by William Whitaker to Scarborough, opening text, see Potten, 'The Libraries of Robert Kelsall, Samuel De La Rose, and William Whitaker'.

30 *The Works of Thomas Adam*, 3 vols. (London: Ogle, Duncan & Co., 1822), *Dissenting Academies Online*: VLS record 32898. The third volume survives in the Northern Congregational College Collection, Rylands number R216840.

### Benefaction at Three Colleges: Airedale, Rotherham and Lancashire

The donation of private books and libraries was not the only means by which the libraries of dissenting academies grew. The libraries of the northern academies at Airedale, Rotherham and Lancashire were developed, some more successfully than others, through dual benefaction strategies. On the one hand they benefited from 'active' acquisition by which sponsors provided financial assistance to allow tutors to select books that they deemed necessary for the education of students. On the other, the libraries also built their collections through modes of 'passive' acquisition by which donors presented volumes of their own for the academy's use. The usefulness of these donated volumes varied, not least as changes and additions were made to the curriculum, and student numbers increased.

#### *Airedale*

The failure of Samuel Walker's academy at Northowram in 1794 left the populous manufacturing region around Bradford without a dissenting academy for the first time since the early eighteenth century.<sup>31</sup> Edward Hanson (d.1806), who came from Yorkshire but was living in London, provided funds to establish an academy at Idle, a manufacturing village about five miles northeast of Bradford. Due to an omission in Hanson's will, however, the annuity of £150 could not be drawn during the first year following his death. This led the committee to appeal successfully to the "public spirit of the neighbouring congregations", meaning the Congregational community, for funds.<sup>32</sup> Samuel Aydon of Shelf Iron Works near Bradford received subscriptions and donations on behalf of the committee, and himself donated "a pair of excellent globes, Calmet's *Dictionary* [of the Holy Bible] and Jackson's [Chronological] *Antiquities*", and the publishers of the works of Doddridge sent "the detached works of that Author".<sup>33</sup> In the minutes of a general meeting of subscribers in 1808, William

31 Simon N. Dixon, 'Airedale Independent College (1800–88)', *Dissenting Academies Online*: D&E.

32 *Address to the Friends of Christianity, Especially Such as Reside in the West Riding of Yorkshire on the Establishment of the Academy* (Idle: John Vint, 1824), p. 8.

33 *Address to the Friends of Christianity*, p. 8; *Minutes of a General Meeting of Subscribers Held at Idle, June 25, 1806* (Idle: John Vint, 1824), p. 9. Editions of Calmet's *Dictionary* and/or Jackson's *Antiquities* were in the libraries of Bristol Baptist Academy, Manchester College, Homerton Academy, Coward College and Lancashire Independent College, see *Dissenting Academies Online*: VLS. The accounts of the various academies show small sums paid to booksellers, but beyond the Doddridge, there is no evidence that unsolicited material

Vint was requested to purchase books for the academy, funds permitting, and £36 was spent on books according to the statement of accounts for 1808–10.<sup>34</sup> Later, the Revd George Waterhouse (d. 1844) purchased books, mainly lexicons and works on divinity, on behalf of Airedale College.<sup>35</sup>

As student numbers at Airedale rose, so too did the expense of educating and housing them; the academy began with two students and by 1812 it had ten.<sup>36</sup> At a general meeting in 1812 it was prescribed that, once trained, all former students would become annual subscribers to the academy, thereby encouraging their congregations to support the institution. This hope was not fulfilled, as the report of 1813–15 indicates, largely because between 1810 and 1815 ten chapels were opened and students as new ministers to these congregations directed their efforts and funds towards their construction. Furthermore, the report of 1820–21 alludes to the economic dislocation experienced by communities after the end of hostilities with France as an explanation for a significant shortfall in subscriptions.

Donations of books continued to come into the academy in order to fulfil its educational mission, but more often the committee received funds to purchase books. In 1817 the Revd Charles Ely (c.1767–1816) of New Road, Bury, Lancashire left a legacy of £5 5s. and "a parcel of books" to Airedale.<sup>37</sup> In 1818–19 "several expensive but useful books" were purchased, amounting to £15 8s., including Walter Wilson's *History of Dissenting Churches* (1808), Dr Boothroyd's *Bible* (1818), and Schaaf's *Syriac Lexicon* (1708).<sup>38</sup> The accounts show further sums spent on books: £6 in 1820, and £10 in 1821. Evidently, books for the students were costly and in short supply; the committee emphasised that its purchases

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came from booksellers. It is possible that the Doddridge's *Works* referred to is the 1802–5 edition printed in ten volumes in Leeds by Edward Baines and edited by Edward Parsons (1762–1833) and Edward Williams (1750–1813), theological tutor at Rotherham. For Aydon's Iron Works, see Gary Firth, *Bradford and the Industrial Revolution, An Economic History 1760–1840* (Halifax: Ryburn Press, 1990), p. 135.

34 *Minutes of a General Meeting of Subscribers Held at Idle, June 29, 1808*, p. 7.

35 *Report of Airedale Independent College, 1841–42* (Idle: John Vint, 1842), account of receipts and disbursements for increasing the contents of the library by the Revd G. Waterhouse, p. 8; see also Surman ID: 28659.

36 *Report of Independent Academy at Idle, 1810–12* (Idle: John Vint, 1824), p. 3.

37 He and Thomas Taylor were two of the students transferred from Northowram to William Vint in 1795. He also left a bequest of books to Rotherham Independent College. See Charles Ely D&E ID: 5079 and Surman ID: 8237.

38 Another copy of Schaaf's *Syriac Lexicon* was donated to Lancashire Independent College in 1843 by John Clunie. *Appendix to the Report of Idle Independent Academy, 1818–19* (Halifax: P.K. Holden, 1819), pp. 18, 33.

were “useful” at the same time as reporting the cost. Purchases made by the committee filled gaps in their library, but limited finances meant that this was in no way a regular occurrence. Edward Parsons’s 1823 address to the students at Idle on the subject of prudence emphasised the need to “Thoroughly read one book before you purchase another; and in every such purchase, make as sure as you can of your pennyworth for your penny”.<sup>39</sup> In 1821–22 the Airedale Committee’s report expressed surprise that some remarkable books sent by “an unknown hand” were hardly duplicated in the existing library.<sup>40</sup> Over the years, the committee relied on legacies and one-off donations to meet expenses.

In 1829 it was decided that Airedale, which became a college in 1826, could be moved from Idle to an estate at Undercliffe, located in “the immediate [and more populous] neighbourhood of Bradford”, without contravening the terms of Edward Hanson’s legacy and that a new institutional structure could be built.<sup>41</sup> The township of Bradford increased in population by nearly 50,000 between 1780 and 1850, and the borough by some 95,000. The demand for ministers to serve its congregations was high.<sup>42</sup> Mrs Mary Bacon (c.1770–1853), sister of Miss Sarah Balme (c.1766–1828) of Spring House, Horton, Bradford, who together had rescued the academy’s finances two years previously, offered two estates that year on the condition that £1,500 was subscribed for the new education building, which it duly was.<sup>43</sup> Mrs Bacon was thanked and congratulated by the committee on these first steps towards putting her “benevolent intentions” into effect for the benefit of churches “in future times, as a result of the design which she and her late pious sister formed to promote the interests of religion”.<sup>44</sup>

The gifts of Mary Bacon and Sarah Balme remind us that female benefactors and subscribers, of which there were many, often devoutly religious, played a significant role in the development of the northern dissenting academies and their libraries. In fact, few donors were more important than Mary Bacon,

39 *An Address Delivered to the Students in the Independent Academy at Idle, 1823* (Halifax: P.K. Holden, 1823), p. 7. The Revd Edward Parsons Sr was a Congregational minister in Leeds and one of the founders of the LMS, see D&E ID: 2009 and Surman ID: 22046. His son, Edward Parsons Jr (1797–1844), was also a Congregational minister, first at Halifax, then in London, see D&E ID: 2010 and Surman ID: 22047.

40 *Report of Independent Academy at Idle, 1821–22* (Halifax: P.K. Holden, 1822), p. 12.

41 *Report of Airedale Independent College, near Bradford, 1828–29* (Idle: John Vint, 1829), p. 4.

42 See Firth, *Bradford and the Industrial Revolution*, p. 47.

43 Simon N. Dixon, ‘Airedale Independent College (1800–88)’, *Dissenting Academies Online*: D&E. The other estate was used to generate rental income for the new college.

44 *Report of Airedale Independent College, 1828–29*, p. 10.

who was a subscriber to both Airedale and Blackburn. Her brother, John Balme (c.1769–1813) of Bradford, a worsted manufacturer, was also an early subscriber and supporter of the academy.<sup>45</sup> She gave funds, including £8,000 in 1845 for the future maintenance of the college, and books. In 1834 the committee thanked her for purchasing "a splendid copy" of A.J. Valpy's edition of Stephen's *Greek Thesaurus* in nine volumes from the library of William Vint, who had died the previous March, just ten days after the students relocated to Undercliffe. Bacon's gift indicated that Vint's collection was no longer at the college's disposal, but also illustrated her desire to commemorate on behalf of the dissenting community the major role played by Vint in the development of that community and its academy.

In fact, a timely appeal was made for donations once Vint's private books had been separated from those owned by Airedale College. The new library at Undercliffe held only around 1,000 volumes, many of which were described as "meagre and inadequate".<sup>46</sup> Numerous supporters donated books, including former students John Cockin (1783–1861), Minister of Lane Chapel, Holmfirth, Yorkshire, and John Kelly (1801–76), Minister of Bethesda Chapel, Liverpool.<sup>47</sup> The latter presented the Airedale College library with "Venina on the Psalms".<sup>48</sup> Several students gave books, including Mr Hessel who gifted the works of Isaac Barrow, fulfilling the terms of a standing resolution passed in 1835–36 that each student after their first year was required to add a book to the library.<sup>49</sup> Thereafter, regular appeals by the committee for donations of books or funds to purchase books were heeded in recognition of the new college and

45 Mr John Balme, Miss Sarah Balme, both of Bradford, and Mrs Bacon of Wolverhampton first subscribed in 1808, *Minutes of General Meeting of Subscribers held at Idle, June 20, 1810* (Idle: John Vint, 1824), p. 6. See also Kaye, *For the Work of the Ministry*, pp. 38–39. Kaye suggests that John Balme was the father of three daughters, two of whom were married. According to the monument in Bradford Cathedral, John Balme had three sisters: Sarah, Elizabeth who married Samuel Bradley (d.1825) of Bradford, and Mary who married William Bacon of Wolverhampton (d.1818), a business man and one time partner of John Mander (1754–1827), Chemist.

46 *Report of Airedale Independent College, 1833–34*, p. 12.

47 John Cockin D&E ID: 5042 and Surman ID: 5954; John Kelly D&E ID: 597 and Surman ID: 31004.

48 *Report of Airedale Independent College, 1834–35*, p. 10. Thus far it has not been possible to identify the title 'Venina on the Psalms'. Kelly also donated books to Lancashire Independent College in 1843, for example, John Selden's *The Historie of Tithes* (London: [s.n.], 1618).

49 *Report of Airedale Independent College, 1834–35*, p. 10; John Hessel (1814–38) D&E ID: 5406.

its hardworking students, and of Mrs Bacon's commitment.<sup>50</sup> Students made requests for one or two specific titles at various times, for example Schleusner's *Lexicon*, but the committee itself resisted issuing a comprehensive list of requirements, apparently finding it difficult to make such a selection.<sup>51</sup>

Vint's library might have been sold and dispersed, but the libraries of other tutors were incorporated into the college's collection. The Revd Thomas Rawson Taylor (1807–35), who had been a student at Leaf Square School and Idle Academy and an assistant to Vint, became tutor in Mathematics and Classics after Vint's death.<sup>52</sup> Taylor's health proved poor, however, and he died just a year after his appointment in 1835, leaving a "considerable part of his library" to the college; one example of a Rawson Taylor book survives in the NCC collection, namely Hugo Grotius, *Consultationem G. Cassandri annotata*, published in Leiden by Elsevier in 1642. Furthermore, his father, the Revd Thomas Taylor (1768–1853), Minister of Horton Lane, Bradford between 1808 and 1835, gave various theological books in memory of his son.

Despite frequent and generous donations of books and funds, in 1852 the committee at Airedale acknowledged that the library still required improvement and that they wished to raise £200 to purchase more books. Like the Balme family of Bradford, Titus Salt (1803–76) of Salt Mills and Saltaire, and the Crossley brothers of Halifax, were industrialists, philanthropists and long-time supporters of the college, and gave £20 respectively to start the fund.<sup>53</sup> A sub-committee including the tutors, the secretary of the college, and the Revd Jonathan Glyde (1808–54), Minister of Horton Lane after Thomas Taylor, met frequently to assess the library and decide upon the "books most wanted".<sup>54</sup> By 1853 the target of £200 had been surpassed and the sub-committee had drawn up a list of required titles to purchase. Thereafter the reports included a library section listing further donations. Yet Airedale College, like Rotherham, continued to face financial difficulties as congregational contributions from the locality and the whole of the West Riding were too low to meet its expenses, generating only £400 in 1857–58.

50 Simon N. Dixon, 'Airedale Independent College (1800–88)', *Dissenting Academies Online: D&E*. The reports of Airedale College list donors and some titles, for example 1835–36, p. 7.

51 *Report of Idle Independent Academy, 1821–22*, p. 12.

52 Thomas Rawson Taylor D&E ID: 598 and Surman ID: 27758.

53 *Report of Airedale Independent College, 1851–52* (Bradford: Wm. Byles, 1852), p. 6; Simon N. Dixon, 'Airedale Independent College (1800–88)', *Dissenting Academies Online: D&E*.

54 *Report of Airedale Independent College, 1852–53* (Bradford: Wm. Byles, 1853), p. 5; Jonathan Glyde D&E ID: 4277 and Surman ID: 11270.



### *Rotherham*

The college at Rotherham also owed its origins to the dissolution of Samuel Walker's academy at Northowram in 1794. That academy had been funded by the Northern Education Society, based in London, but the new academy was to be directed by local ministers and laymen living in the north. Both Halifax and Rotherham emerged as early possible locations for the academy. The latter won out under the influence of treasurer Joshua Walker (d.1815), who came from a family of wealthy iron manufacturers from the town. (His father, Samuel, and uncle had built the dissenting meeting house at Masbrough.) The college's first structure was erected in 1795 and was funded by a £500 loan from Walker. A second building was added in 1816, providing a new library and more bedrooms and studies for students.<sup>55</sup>

The tutors and students at Rotherham originally used the library that Samuel Walker (no relation to Samuel Walker of Rotherham) had provided for his students at Northowram, which was purchased in 1795. Donations of £100 each from Thomas and Joseph Walker, brothers of Joshua, helped augment the library's collections. In addition women from the local community gave two new globes, whilst another gentleman gave a telescope and quadrant, and Edward Williams, the first tutor at Rotherham, sold an orrery to the college in 1810. In 1816 a bequest of books from the estate of the Revd Charles Ely and another donation of £100 from Thomas Walker helped to enlarge the collection still further. By 1819 the insurance value of the printed books in the college building, which included the library and the private collections of students, was placed at £700, a not insubstantial figure.<sup>56</sup>

A generation later, however, the college reported that an active committee was required "for the purpose of examining the wants of the library and of seeing those wants supplied".<sup>57</sup> The cost of running the institution had continued to outstrip its income, although numerous donations were made by the wider community, principally the towns of the West Riding, and networks in London. In 1843 Dr Caleb Crowther (1769–1849), a physician who provided land and funds to establish almshouses for poor dissenters in Wakefield, gave £25 for the purchase of library books, but it was noted in 1844 by the committee that the treasurer, W. Beatson of Masbrough, required a further £340 to clear the college's debts. Hopes rested with the Jubilee Memorial in 1845 and its

55 Simon N. Dixon, 'Rotherham Independent College (1795–1888)', *Dissenting Academies Online: D&E*; see also Kaye, *For the Work of the Ministry*, pp. 28–35.

56 Dixon, 'Rotherham Independent College'.

57 *The Annual Report of the Independent College at Rotherham, June 30, 1847* (Sheffield: Robert Leader, 1847), p. 4.

accompanying fund. Supporters of many academies contributed to this fund, including George Hadfield (1787–1879) of Manchester, formerly Treasurer of Blackburn Independent Academy and Liberal M.P. for Sheffield (1852–74), and the Revd James Turner (1782–1863) of Knutsford, Cheshire.<sup>58</sup> By 1846 the fund had reached £900, freeing the college – for the time being – from debt. Yet by 1847 no amount for the purchase of books for the library had been set aside or included in the accounts for several years,<sup>59</sup> and only eight years after Rotherham had been incorporated with London University by Royal Warrant in 1841, its students complained that they were not being fully prepared by the college to take degrees.<sup>60</sup> Only after its financial situation improved during the 1850s did the committee finally appeal for specific titles to meet the requirements of its broadened curriculum.<sup>61</sup>

Rotherham College was never intended to compete with Airedale, and in 1850 the committee of the former proposed a conference with a view to uniting the two institutions. A meeting at Leeds concluded that an independent college for Yorkshire was desirable. For the moment, however, this was not practicable for Rotherham's "want of funds" was once again acute, not least due to the failure of its Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway stock purchased in 1848.<sup>62</sup> Rather than offer an inferior education, the committee declared that it would instead discontinue the activities of Rotherham College and made a plaintive direct appeal to its "friends" for financial support. Despite the fact that "the mercantile and manufacturing classes", as the committee referred to its supporters, were "distracted" by the Great Exhibition held the following year, it still succeeded in raising £700 by voluntary gifts and an increase in annual subscriptions towards the debt owed to the Sheffield Banking Company.<sup>63</sup>

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58 Both also contributed funds to Lancashire Independent College. James Turner D&E ID: 2202 and Surman ID: 28043.

59 No reference is made to the purchase of books in the accounts for Rotherham Independent College 1845–51.

60 Dixon, 'Rotherham Independent College'.

61 Ibid.

62 *The Annual Report of Rotherham Independent College, 26 June 1850* (Sheffield: Robert Leader, 1850), pp. 6–7. The report of 1844 mentioned that although small in comparison with the newly-established colleges at Birmingham and Manchester, Rotherham's location was advantageous, not least because the railway now passed its door. This fact may have led to the purchase of the stocks.

63 *The Annual Report of the Independent College at Rotherham, 25 June 1851* (Sheffield: Robert Leader, 1851), p. 5.

The improved financial position of Rotherham College had a positive effect on the library. In 1852 the accounts included a grant for books of £10 and a further £20 in 1853. Donations of books came from the London University, and from several former students, including the Revds George Shaw (1821–99), Thomas Ellis (1823–1910) and John Lockwood (1814–88).<sup>64</sup> The following year Thomas Herbert of Nottingham was thanked by the committee for his valuable presents of books; Herbert purchased books from the library of the Revd Joseph Gilbert (1779–1852), a classical tutor (1810–17) at Rotherham, and later a minister in Nottingham, and presented them to the college as a memorial to him.<sup>65</sup> A 1720 edition of Grotius's *De jure belli ac pacis*, which survives in the NCC collection, was previously owned by Joseph Gilbert and Thomas Herbert. In addition, the daughters of the Revd Samuel Barber (1779–1854) of Bridgnorth, another former student of Rotherham, following their father's wishes, donated 130 volumes, some for the library and some specifically for the students themselves.<sup>66</sup> Clearly, the books gifted by these alumni, serving ministers and their families were more relevant to students studying an enhanced curriculum, as indeed were those donated by the influential supporter of both Rotherham and Airedale Colleges, Thomas Scales.

In 1855 the "long tried and valued friend" of Rotherham College, Thomas Scales (1786–1860), who was also an examiner for Airedale, an administrator of the Balme family's charity, and one of the founders of Silcoates School in Wakefield, gave twenty-eight volumes to the library.<sup>67</sup> Two tract volumes donated by Scales, including sermons by Philip Doddridge and Thomas Belsham, survive in the NCC collection. Rotherham's committee also appealed for books or funds to enrich the library, which remained deficient in works on modern science and general literature, having already made a lengthy defence of its broad curriculum as essential to the education of a "more accomplished and learned ministry".<sup>68</sup> A list of titles was appended to the report of 1859 and included the works of Coleridge, *The Wealth of Nations* by Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill's *Principles of Political Economy*, first published in 1848. The donation of books was central to the educational endeavour of

64 George Shaw D&E ID: 1077 and Surman ID: 26104; John Lockwood D&E ID: 1068 and Surman ID: 17667; Thomas Ellis D&E ID: 5853 and Surman ID: 8203.

65 *The Annual Report of the Independent College at Rotherham*, 29 June 1853 (Sheffield: Robert Leader, 1853), p. 4; Simon N. Dixon, 'Gilbert, Joseph (1779–1852)', *Dissenting Academies Online: D&E*, June 2011.

66 Samuel Barber D&E ID: 5809; *The Annual Report of the Independent College at Rotherham*, 27 June 1855 (Sheffield: Robert Leader, 1855), p. 5.

67 Thomas Scales D&E ID: 5646 and Surman ID: 26014.

68 *The Annual Report of the Independent College at Rotherham*, June 29, 1859, p. 7.

the academy in Rotherham, leading the committee to take the unusual step of requesting specific titles. Although these donations enriched the library, they were primarily gifts of 'old' books, leaving the collection in need of current texts.

Both Rotherham and Airedale experienced further difficulties during the 1860s. The college building at Rotherham was damaged by a boiler explosion and, at a similar time, the Airedale College building was deemed unsuitable: it was cold, exposed and too closely situated to a cemetery.<sup>69</sup> Although sustaining two colleges in Yorkshire was problematic, an agreement over a union still could not be reached. Instead, two new college buildings, one in Rotherham and the other in Bradford opened during the 1870s. After further discussions, staff, students and books from Rotherham finally moved to Bradford in 1889 and the Yorkshire United Independent College commenced.<sup>70</sup>

### *Lancashire*

Lancashire Independent College opened its doors in 1843, a successor to Blackburn Academy (established in 1816). The financial problems of Blackburn had grown over the years to the point where they were acute by the late 1830s, despite the support it had received. Several donations to the library had been made, including Thomas Beilby's gift of 150 volumes, as well as funds for the purchase of books, but the library still required serious improvement. In 1838 Blackburn's committee drew up an extensive list of desired titles and authors, arranged by subject, and set aside £50 for the library to purchase books.<sup>71</sup> Subjects listed included theology, religious biography, and biblical criticism, as well as books in general literature and intellectual and physical science that included the works of Milton, Bacon, Dryden, and Pope, "McCulloch's edition of Smith's Wealth of Nations, Mill's Elements of Political Economy, [and] Malthus on population".<sup>72</sup> The funds and the appeal for specific works apparently came too late.

The academy's very situation in Blackburn contributed to these difficulties – it was perceived to be too far from the centres of population of Manchester and Liverpool and, therefore, from potential subscribers – and so a new college was proposed. By 1840 plans for a "greater institution in Manchester" had been formalised and £14,000 subscribed for that purpose, with Samuel Brooks

69 Dixon, 'Rotherham Independent College'; Kaye, *For the Work of the Ministry*, p.108.

70 Dixon, 'Rotherham Independent College'; Kaye, *For the Work of the Ministry*, pp. 112, 127.

71 *Report of the Committee of Blackburn Independent Academy, 1838* (Blackburn: J. Burrell, 1838), p. 9 and list of books pp. 21–24.

72 *Report of the Committee of Blackburn Independent Academy, 1838*, List of books pp. 21–24.

(1793–1864), banker and cotton manufacturer, offering part of his estate in Withington "on the most reasonable terms".<sup>73</sup> Two thousand volumes were transferred from Blackburn, many in need of repair, and it was concluded that the library of the new Lancashire College was "seriously deficient in nearly every branch of literature".<sup>74</sup>

The college was established in an impressive new building, complete with a ninety-two-foot high Gothic tower, on a seven-acre plot at Whalley Range, Withington, on the outskirts of Manchester.<sup>75</sup> The building attracted fresh library donations. In 1843 John Clunie (c.1784–c.1858), who had previously donated books to Blackburn Academy, presented 770 books from his own library for the education of the students on its opening, forty-four of which are recorded in the VLS. In 1843 P. Latham, who donated the Kelsall and De La Rose owned copy of *Vindiciae legis*, gave six volumes to Lancashire, four of which are recorded in the VLS.<sup>76</sup> Further donations of books to the library were made by the Revd John Kelly (1801–76), who presented seventy-one volumes; Sir John Bickerton Williams (1792–1856) of Wem, Shropshire, and biographer of Matthew Henry, who gave fifty-two volumes; and the Revd James Turner (1782–1863), who gave eighty-eight volumes; surviving copies from each of these donors are also recorded on the VLS.<sup>77</sup> In total, Lancashire received a further 1,723 volumes, taking the library's holdings to around 4,000 volumes. Nonetheless, the committee continued to appeal for funds specifically for the library and particularly for donations of both standard works and literature.<sup>78</sup>

By the 1860s student numbers at Lancashire had risen closer to the then capacity of fifty whilst the financial position of the college had stabilised and its relationship with Owens College (founded in 1851 and forerunner of the University of Manchester) was re-established on a more permanent basis. A further increase in student numbers led to the extension of the college building

73 *Report of the Committee of Blackburn Independent Academy, 1840* (Blackburn: J. Burrell, 1840), pp. 9–10.

74 *Report of the Committee of the Lancashire Independent College presented at the Annual General Meeting, December 27, 1843* (Manchester: Septimus Fletcher, 1844), p. 11.

75 Simon N. Dixon, 'Lancashire Independent College (1843–1958)', *Dissenting Academies Online: D&E*.

76 Two of Latham's donations were written by the Revd Thomas Goodwin (1600–80), who was clearly a favourite; Latham also presented an original engraving of Goodwin to the college.

77 John Kelly D&E ID: 597 and Surman ID: 31004; James Turner D&E ID: 2202 and Surman ID: 28043.

78 *Report of the Committee of the Lancashire Independent College, 1843*, pp. 12–13.

in 1878.<sup>79</sup> During the same period, the library's holdings also improved significantly. In 1861 Dr Thomas Raffles (1788–1863), Minister of Great George Street, Liverpool, who served as chairman of the college from 1839 until his death in 1863, and who had been a member of the general committee of Blackburn Academy, donated his testimonial fund (raised to mark the fiftieth year of his pastorate) to Lancashire enabling the future purchase of the books referred to as the “Raffles Library”.<sup>80</sup> By 1885 the library was considered sufficiently large and interesting to merit a printed catalogue. The collection was clearly perceived as an object of pride, both as “the principal theological library in this district”, containing 10,580 volumes, but also as an object of curiosity, with its “Mss. of the 14th century, and many rare and early printed books, amongst which are specimens from the presses of Ulric Zell, of Cologne; Aldus Manutius, of Venice; the Stephens's of Paris; the Elzevirs; Jehan Petit, and Plantin”.<sup>81</sup>

### Conclusion

Studying provenance marks in conjunction with institutional records reveals the centrality of benefaction to the development of dissenting academy libraries, and indeed to the academies themselves. Donors gave books and funding for libraries to dissenting academies for many reasons: as a memorial to relatives and/or influential former tutors; to provide for the education of ministerial students and in so doing safeguard the spiritual welfare of growing congregations; and from a sense of community obligation, as particularly evinced by nonconformist industrialist families like the Balmes of Bradford and the Walkers of Rotherham. As has been shown, many donors and subscribers did not confine their support to one institution, and networks of dissenters worked tirelessly and gave generously to academies across Lancashire and Yorkshire. By enabling dissenting academies in the north to survive and indeed advance into the nineteenth century, benefactors sought to ensure that rapidly expanding dissenting communities could also continue to thrive.

Library benefaction had a number of facets. Academies benefited through the passive reception of donated books, but also through active acquisition of desired titles and, more often, through the gift of funds to purchase

79 Dixon, ‘Lancashire Independent College (1843–1958)’.

80 Thomas Raffles Surman ID: 22424.

81 *Catalogue of the Library of the Lancashire Independent College, Manchester*, Preface by Charles Goodyear, Librarian; *Dissenting Academies Online: VLS, Lancashire*.

them; committees often solicited funds specifically for the development of collections. Some academies encouraged the donation of books and steered their benefactors with lists of desiderata, providing a rare insight into the texts they actively sought for the education of the ministry. These lists also reveal where academy libraries were deficient, and indirectly demonstrate how central the library was to the educational endeavour. The committees saw remedying deficiencies in the libraries as critical. As the committee at Rotherham College wrote in 1859, "if the libraries [of the colleges] were ill-furnished ... the consequences must be, that education in such colleges would be meagre".<sup>82</sup>

Benefaction enriched the pedagogic experience of students, but for every useful text actively sought by an academy for its library, there were many more of limited use which were passively accepted. This potentially impacts on our interpretation of surviving academy library catalogues and book lists, particularly in the absence of borrower records. In order to identify the books academy students read and used, further contextual evidence, where this survives, must be utilised: lists of desiderata and curricula published in annual reports, tutors' lecture notes, notes made by students attending lectures, references in letters, and autobiographies. Furthermore, donations often duplicated existing holdings in academy libraries and, although gifts from ministerial libraries strengthened the theological collections, contemporary books on literature, modern languages, and science, as well as scientific apparatus, were often lacking.

The central role played by benefaction in the development of dissenting academy libraries can also inform our understanding of book use and of the relationship between private and public book ownership. Students gifted books that they thought would be useful for their studies but knew were missing from the library, and tutors bequeathed or donated books from their own libraries to support the education of the students. Academy libraries became repositories for books that had been passed on and shared by dissenting families and communities who, as Thomas Beilby's bookplate made explicit, wanted them to remain within the dissenting community in perpetuity. These donations could be small, perhaps one or two volumes; occasionally they represented the entirety of a private library. The libraries of William Vint, William Whitaker, Robert Kelsall and John Clunie enriched academy libraries, but the individual books they contained, such as Mary Jole's copy of Ambrose's *War with Devils*, had circulated in and supported a wider dissenting community for generations.

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82 *Report of the Jubilee Meeting of Rotherham Independent College, 1 & 2 July, 1845* (London: Jackson and Walford, 1845), pp. 23–24.

## The Foundation of Plymouth Public Library: Cultural Status, Philanthropy and Expanding Readerships, 1810–1825

Annika Bautz\*

The second half of the eighteenth century saw a rapid increase in subscription libraries throughout the United Kingdom and around the Atlantic World. Geoffrey Forster and Alan Bell establish a total of 274 subscription libraries that had been founded in England alone before 1850. Of that number, only ten survive into the twenty-first century.<sup>1</sup> While larger institutions in bigger cities, especially those that survive in their original buildings, have received some attention in recent decades, coverage of provincial institutions has been more patchy, yet they are equally important for our identification of general trends as well as regional differences in the history of libraries and reading in Britain.<sup>2</sup> This chapter focuses on Plymouth Public Library, which still survives as the Plymouth Proprietary Library, locating debates about its motivation, aims, and foundation in a national and Atlantic context, as well as addressing questions of access, class, and gender. In its day, the Plymouth Public Library was as large and monumental as the Manchester Portico or the Liverpool Athenaeum, but it has never been the object of extended study, despite a good deal of surviving material, including minutes of early meetings and seven surviving

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1 G. Forster and A. Bell, 'The Subscription Libraries and their Members', in A. Black and P. Hoare (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland, Volume 3: 1850–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 146–68, at p. 148.

2 Studies of individual subscription libraries include David Allan, 'Eighteenth-Century Private Subscription Libraries and Provincial Urban Culture: the Amicable Society of Lancaster, 1769–c.1820', *Library History*, 17.1 (2001), pp. 57–76; Kathleen Hapgood, 'Library Practice in the Bristol Library Society, 1772–1830', *Library History*, 5.5 (January 1981), pp. 145–53; Sarah Joynes, 'The Sheffield Library, 1771–1907', *Library History*, 2.3 (January 1971), pp. 91–116; Ann Brooks and Bryan Haworth, *Portico Library: A History* (Lancaster: Carnegie, 2000); Dennis Cox, 'The Leeds Library', *Library Review*, 44.3 (1995), pp. 12–16.



catalogues of its nineteenth-century holdings.<sup>3</sup> By focusing on unexamined archival material, this chapter argues for a new reading of the city's oldest surviving cultural institution. The early proprietors' definition of 'public' is key to our evolving understanding of the library's function as a community library: instead of the much later meaning of 'public library' as free at the point of use, this institution was instead explicitly designed for the city's public good and public prestige, and therefore contributed to the community and identity formation of Plymouth in the early nineteenth century.

The Plymouth Public Library was founded in 1810, relatively late compared to similar institutions elsewhere. As this chapter will show, the library was funded by – and can be considered a manifestation of – the increased wealth brought to the city, the nation's chief naval station, during the Napoleonic Wars. The popular narrative of the history of Plymouth tends to be one of twentieth-century destruction, not nineteenth-century construction. It was a city heavily bombed in the Plymouth Blitz of spring 1941, when most of the city centre buildings were destroyed, including the lavish library building. (The library has since been operating from different premises.) Yet Plymouth was hit so hard in World War II precisely because of the naval base that had brought it so much prosperity 150 years before. While local history in Plymouth focuses on a narrative of destruction and ensuing poverty, this chapter begins to offer a counter-narrative, one in which Plymouth's oldest surviving cultural institution and key community library, its subscription library, emerges from money gained through war, enabling the flourishing of culture and the dissemination of knowledge, but even more importantly securing prestige for the city and its leading men.

### Founding Plymouth Public Library

In May 1810, a group comprising many of the leading men of the town met in the Plymouth Guildhall to discuss their "Proposal, for an Association and Subscription for a Public Library":

Some Friends to the Advancement and Prosperity of Plymouth and its Environs having for some time expressed a desire of following the

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<sup>3</sup> Margaret Lattimore's doctoral thesis devotes a short section to the library, but she is unaware both of the minutes' existence and of the early catalogues; 'The History of Libraries in Plymouth to 1914: A Study of the Library Developments in the Three Towns of Plymouth, Devonport and Stonehouse which Amalgamated into Plymouth in 1914', unpublished PhD

Example of other great Towns in the Kingdom by forming an Association for the Establishment of a Public Library, with the view to open the way and provide the means for an easier and more extended diffusion of Science & Literature.<sup>4</sup>

Five observations follow from this mission: first, the founders' primary concern was the advancement and prosperity of Plymouth. Secondly, they consciously followed a national and Atlantic movement in their wish to establish a public library. Thirdly, they desired to differentiate this new library from the numerous circulating libraries that existed in Plymouth at the time.<sup>5</sup> Circulating libraries were run for profit, and were often represented as providing primarily ephemeral and popular novels (though, as David Allan has shown, this idea of the predominance of novels in circulating libraries was not necessarily accurate).<sup>6</sup> By contrast, the new public library would acquire works of lasting value, "the

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thesis, University of London, 1982. Other studies note the library's existence, or comment on aspects of it, e.g. K.A. Manley, 'Lounging Places and Frivolous Literature: Subscription and Circulating Libraries in the West Country to 1825', in J. Hinks and C. Armstrong (eds.) *Printing Places: Locations of Book Production and Distribution Since 1500* (New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press, 2005), pp. 107–20. Some major overviews do not mention the PPL at all, such as David Allan, *A Nation of Readers: The Lending Library in Georgian England* (London: British Library, 2008). Some of the minutes survive in manuscript, most in the form of an early twentieth-century typed copy. The catalogues date from 1824, 1835, 1843, 1854, 1862, 1876, 1888.

- 4 Plymouth Proprietary Library Archive [hereafter, PPLA], 'Plymouth: Proposal for an Association and Subscription for a Public Library', n/d [19 May 1810], p.1.
- 5 For a list of the libraries in Plymouth in the early nineteenth century, including around thirty-two circulating libraries, see Robin Alston's Library History Database, currently available at <http://www.scribd.com/doc/63097781/Robin-Alston-Library-History-England> [accessed 10 March 2015]. Allan has suggested that numbers of circulating libraries in most cities are likely to have been much higher than the record indicates; *Nation of Readers*, p. 124. See also Ian Maxted, *The Devon Booktrades: A Biographical Dictionary* (Exeter: Working Papers, 1991). For a discussion of some of these libraries, see Manley, 'Lounging Places'; and Lattimore, 'Libraries in Plymouth', especially pp. 118–39.
- 6 Allan, *Nation of Readers*, especially pp. 134–39. On circulating libraries, novels and gender see Barbara M. Benedict, 'Jane Austen and the Culture of Circulating Libraries: The Construction of Female Literacy', in Paula Backscheider (ed.), *Revising Women: Eighteenth-Century 'Women's Fiction' and Social Engagement* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins, 2000), pp. 147–99; William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), especially pp. 242–46; Christopher Skelton-Foord, 'Walter Scott and the Engendering of the Popular Novel: Circulating Library Holdings of British fiction, 1805–1819', in Werner Huber (ed.), *The Corvey Library and Anglo-German Cultural Exchanges, 1770–1837* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink 2004), pp. 101–16; and, of course, Paul Kaufman,

most useful and approved works", as part of a permanent collection.<sup>7</sup> Fourthly, the founding of the library was, in part, motivated by Plymouth's geographical location: the library would make it easier to access serious texts in a regional town. This reflected a trend seen elsewhere; instead of an even distribution of subscription libraries, there were clusters in areas at a greater distance from London; the north-east, north-west, midlands and the south-west.<sup>8</sup> As James Raven maintains, provincial libraries often presented themselves as "outstation[s] of civilisation far from London".<sup>9</sup> This local motivation was bound up with a fifth, moral and social one, as this provincial library would enable a greater spread of learning. While the use of the term 'public' here denotes a library that was not the private possession of a single family or individual (as opposed to the post-1850 innovation of a 'Public Library' that would be free at the point of use), there is a social dimension in this statement of aims as well, which the library's rules later promoted by specifying how access could be granted to non-members, as we will see. These five factors – prestige and prosperity, connected to Plymouth's status in a national context; the accumulation of useful works rather than ephemeral ones; and a moral and social motivation connected to the provincial location – emerge as the driving forces in all the early meetings of the library's proprietors.

None of these motivating factors were particularly distinctive to Plymouth, but some characteristics of the early Plymouth Public Library were a little more unusual: it did not, for example, appear to have had strong links with dissenting clergy, as many other subscription libraries had, nor was there an

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*Libraries and their Users Collected Papers in Library History* (London: The Library Association, 1969), especially pp. 223–28.

7 PPLA, 'Minute Book', 19 May 1810. This is an aim often stated by the founders of subscription libraries. See, for example, Thomas Kelly, *Early Public Libraries: A History of Public Libraries in Great Britain before 1850* (London: Library Association 1966), p. 204, and David Allan's discussion of the libraries' "self-conscious 'collection building'", *Nation of Readers*, p. 88. Interestingly, fiction actually represented a substantial part of the library's holdings: the largest section in the earliest surviving catalogue of 1824 relates to Travel and comprises of about fifty entries, but the second largest is fiction, represented by about thirty titles. *Laws of the Plymouth Public Library, and Catalogue of the Books, Maps, Newspapers* (Plymouth: Creagh, 1824). As Allan points out, novels found "a significant place in most subscription library collections", so this is not unusual; David Allan, "'The Advantages of Literature': The Subscription Library in Georgian Britain", in Alice Crawford (ed.), *The Meaning of the Library: A Cultural History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 115, pp. 103–23.

8 Forster and Bell, 'Subscription Libraries', p. 148.

9 James Raven, 'Libraries for Sociability: The Rise of the Subscription Library', Giles Mandelbrote and Keith A. Manley (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland, Volume 2: 1640–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 241–63, p. 249.

overt emphasis on “associational activity” or “politeness as problem-solving” that institutions founded in the eighteenth century often stressed.<sup>10</sup> But what is most surprising about the aims of the new institution is the way they were prioritised by early members: books played a secondary role, while the focus in early meetings was on the prestige of the city and the library, and by extension that of its founders, which would be advanced by the erection of a purpose-built expensive building. These aims are distinct from those of the Plymouth Institution, founded two years later in 1812, whose initial object was “the reading of essays and discussions on literary and scientific subjects”, taking place in members’ homes.<sup>11</sup> By contrast, even in this first meeting of the founders of Plymouth Public Library, one of the resolutions concerned “the purchase of ground, and the erection of a building”, and this concern with not only a suitable but, importantly, an impressive building remained a high priority in meetings over the next three years.

### The Town and the building

Founding a subscription library in Plymouth was an immediately popular and successful undertaking. By October 1811, the proprietors proudly discussed the “favourable Progress of this Infant Institution, since its recent Commencement, the Value of its existing Property, the Increase of Donations, and the superior Accommodation of an appropriate Building for its permanent Establishment”.<sup>12</sup> Like many other subscription libraries, Plymouth Public Library started off in rented accommodation. In December 1810, the committee at Plymouth procured “a temporary Apartment for the Library and News Room” in the Guildhall, “until separate and more commodious Rooms can be

10 John Crawford, “The high state of culture to which this part of the country has attained”: Libraries, Reading, and Society in Paisley, 1760–1830, *Library & Information History*, 30.3 (2014), pp. 172–94, at p. 174; David Allan, ‘Politeness and the Politics of Culture: An Intellectual History of the Eighteenth-Century Subscription Library’, *Library & Information History*, 29.3 (2013), pp. 159–69, especially pp. 165–68.

11 W.H.K. Wright, *The Libraries, Public and Private, of Plymouth* (London: Library Association, 1901), p. 11. The Plymouth Institution erected a building a few years later, and housed a library as well as a museum and lecture room. It changed its name to Plymouth Athenaeum in 1961.

12 Plymouth and West Devon Record Office [hereafter, PWDRO], ‘Minute Book’, 22 October 1811.

provided, for the permanent purposes of the Institution".<sup>13</sup> The Guildhall was a prestigious venue, identifying the library from the outset spatially with the elite governance of the town and the wider region; indeed, accommodation within the Guildhall was granted to the library by the mayor, who was himself one of the early proprietors.<sup>14</sup> The use of the Guildhall, like the plans for the grand building, shed further light on proprietors' understanding of 'public' as connected both to public good but also always to prestige. Ten months later, on 22 October 1811, one of many "Special General Meeting[s] of the Proprietors" took place at the Guildhall, this time "to receive and inspect the plans of a public library and news room", which had been commissioned from the then London-based architect John Foulston (1772–1841), pupil of the famous Thomas Hardwick. By this time, the Committee had agreed to "the Purchase of a Spot of Ground, in Cornwall Street" on a lease of 1,000 years, a central location which once again signified the prestige and permanency of the institution that was to be built.<sup>15</sup>

Unlike the majority of regional subscription libraries, the proprietors of the Plymouth Public Library immediately had the means for the erection of a purpose-built building, and prioritised this. Many subscription libraries in the period "never attracted enough subscribers to sustain other than a small-scale operation", often from rented premises.<sup>16</sup> Most did not acquire, let alone build, premises of their own, but made do with single rooms or even shelves in a bookshop or schoolroom.<sup>17</sup> Plymouth Public Library belongs to a different, grander, much wealthier kind of subscription library. Many of the institutions that commissioned a building were in big cities, such as Birmingham, which had been founded in 1779 and erected a building in 1799, the Lyceum Liverpool, founded in 1758 and which erected their building in 1802, but also Tavistock, founded in 1799, which had their building designed by Foulston

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13 PWDRO, 'Minute Book', 18 December 1810.

14 Anon. [Henry Woollcombe?], *The Picture of Plymouth; Being a Correct Guide to the Public Establishments, Charitable Institutions, Amusements, and Remarkable Objects in the Towns of Plymouth, Plymouth-Dock, Stonehouse, Stoke, and their Vicinity* (Plymouth and London: Rees & Curtis, 1812), p. 18.

15 PWDRO, 'Minute Book', 22 October 1811.

16 Forster and Bell, 'Subscription Libraries', p. 155.

17 Kelly, *Early Public Libraries*, p. 129; K.A. Manley, 'Jeremy Bentham has been Banned: Contention and Censorship in Private Subscription Libraries before 1825', *Library & Information History*, 29.3 (2013), pp. 170–81, at p. 170. Manley also points out how some subscription libraries "were given space in public buildings, like town halls or schools, which does reveal how libraries were perceived as being for the public good" (p. 170).

in 1821.<sup>18</sup> Unlike these examples, where dedicated buildings were built only decades after the libraries themselves had been founded, the proprietors at Plymouth immediately had the funds to build – putting their library on a par with other prestigious institutional libraries of the same era, the Liverpool Athenaeum (founded in 1797) and the Manchester Portico (founded in 1806), both of which made the construction of a grand bespoke building on a central site an immediate priority.<sup>19</sup>

Largely through its strategically important role in the Napoleonic wars, Plymouth had become the fifth-largest provincial town in England, after Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham and Bristol, whereas it had ranked about twentieth in previous centuries.<sup>20</sup> As Richard Worth explains in his 1871 history, Plymouth emerged as “the chief naval station of the kingdom.... [A]ll our most famous admirals and captains have made it their resort”.<sup>21</sup> The population rose to 43,972 in 1801, and further to 56,616 in 1811, a rate of increase faster than houses could be built to accommodate the growing population.<sup>22</sup> By 1815, there were nineteen ship-building businesses in Plymouth which together built twenty to thirty vessels a year.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, the wars made the city “the greatest emporium in the country for prize shops and goods”, with “wealth flowing in from the lucrative channel of prizes”.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, as William Burt noted in 1816, the wars meant merchants “turned from the permanent and just ends of commerce, to prize agencies, purchases of prize goods, contracts, and

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18 Kelly, *Early Public Libraries*, pp. 127–29; St Clair, *Reading Nation*, p. 667; D.P. Alford, *A Short History of the Tavistock Public Library* (Tavistock, 1895), pp. v–vi. The building was demolished after eleven years on the grounds of being out of keeping with the nearby buildings and “in the way of street improvements”; Eric Kingdon, ‘Tavistock Library’, *Transactions of the Devon Society*, 57 (1946), pp. 229–38, at p. 232. The library went into rented accommodation belonging to the Duke of Bedford.

19 The Portico opened in 1806 in its new building, designed by Thomas Harrison, who had also built the Liverpool Lyceum. <http://www.theportico.org.uk/library/history> [accessed 15 December 2014].

20 Crispin Gill, *Plymouth: A New History* (Newton Abbot: Devon Books, 1993), p. 201.

21 Richard Nicholls Worth, *History of Plymouth* (Plymouth: Brendon, 1871), pp. 85–86.

22 Gill, *Plymouth*, p. 201. The three towns of Plymouth, Stonehouse and Dock were still officially separate in the early nineteenth century, but for the purposes of this paper they are being referred to as ‘Plymouth’ throughout.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 199.

24 Worth, *History of Plymouth*, p. 237; William Burt (secretary to the chamber of commerce in Plymouth), *Review of the Mercantile, Trading, and Manufacturing State, Interests, and Capabilities of the Port of Plymouth* (Plymouth, 1816), p. 131.

other things arising out of a state of warfare".<sup>25</sup> Of the 245 ships Plymouth had in 1808, the majority were privateers, private warships on the hunt for prizes. By 1813, there were 110 registered prize stores, most of which had been built during the wars.<sup>26</sup> Captors were more interested in turning their captured goods into money quickly, than in ensuring they received the best possible price for them, which contributed to making prize handling a lucrative business for the agent.

This new wealth enabled major building projects in the city. In 1814, *The Monthly Magazine* acknowledged that in Plymouth "local improvements and public buildings are a consequence which may be expected to arise from superfluous wealth".<sup>27</sup> The most prominent example of this was the grand Plymouth Theatre and Hotel (see Figure 11.1). Plymouth's increased size, wealth and status, and higher numbers of affluent men, including naval officers, resulted in the decision in 1810 to build a hotel and theatre, "for the greater convenience, accommodation, and amusement of persons resorting to this town, as well as of the inhabitants".<sup>28</sup> The building, erected between 1811–13, included a ballroom, news room, and, importantly, a "sales room for shipping and prize goods".<sup>29</sup> The capital for the building was raised by way of a 'tontine with survivorship', still a common way of raising capital in the early nineteenth century (for example, in 1799 the Birmingham subscription library was built with money raised in this way).<sup>30</sup> Each subscriber to the Plymouth Theatre and Hotel invested £100 or more, and received an annuity of five pounds immediately, with the annuity increasing as the shares of dead members devolved to the other subscribers. The initial capital was not paid back. The ten men who signed the notice about the tontine for the Theatre and Hotel in *The Plymouth Chronicle* in 1810 were all also involved in the founding of the library.<sup>31</sup> Within two weeks of the notice, £11,000 had already been subscribed, the speed of the

25 Burt, *Review*, p. 2.

26 Gill, *Plymouth*, p. 199.

27 'Continuation of the Account of the recent Erection of Public Buildings in various Parts of the British Empire', *The Monthly Magazine*, No.254 (1 May 1814), Part 4, vol. 37, pp. 293–94, at p. 294.

28 'Tontine, with Survivorship', *Plymouth Chronicle and General Advertiser for the West of England*, 26 October 1810.

29 *The Monthly Magazine*, p. 293.

30 Kelly, *Early Public Libraries*, p. 129.

31 Edmund Lockyer Jr. (Mayor), Joseph Pridham, Peter Tonkin, Thomas Cleather, John Langmead, Edmund Lockyer, John Hawker, William Langmead, George Eastlake, Henry Woollcombe.

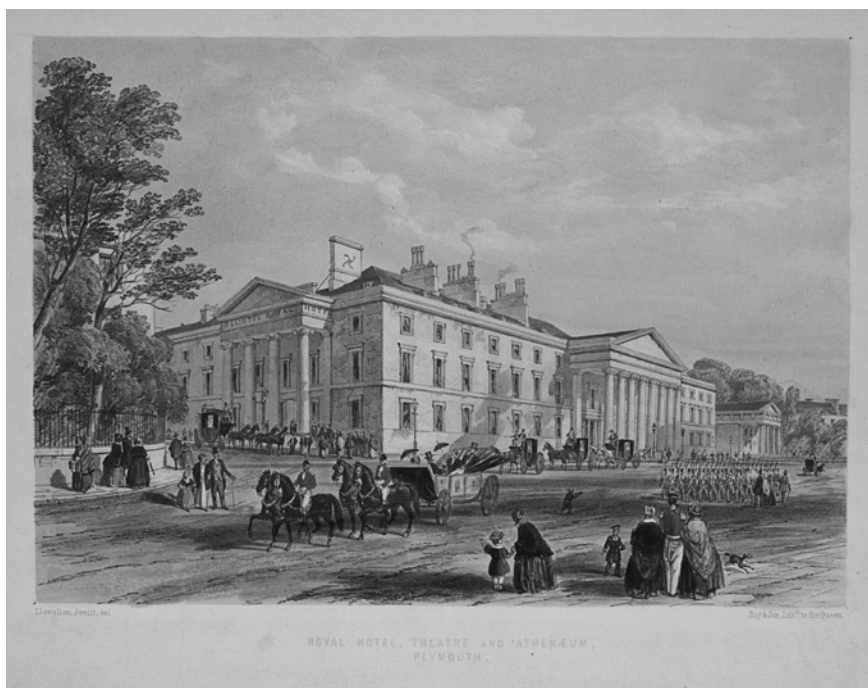


FIGURE 11.1 Plymouth Royal Hotel and Theatre, by Llewellyn F.W. Jewitt, hand-coloured lithograph, ca. 1850.

COURTESY OF VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON.

take-up again testifying to the wealth available in the town.<sup>32</sup> In the end, the splendid building cost £60,000.<sup>33</sup>

The government, too, invested money into Plymouth as being “the most strategically placed naval base”.<sup>34</sup> The breakwater in the Plymouth Sound was started in 1812, with a view to completion in 1818, but it was not finished until 1848, at a cost of £100,000.<sup>35</sup> Erecting a building for the Plymouth Public Library therefore followed on from other large ‘public’ building projects.

The model adopted to finance Plymouth Public Library was not a tontine, but, helping to raise capital for the building rewarded the subscribers with

32 Lattimore, ‘Libraries in Plymouth’, p. 154.

33 Gill, *Plymouth*, p. 194.

34 Ibid., p. 185.

35 Ibid., p. 188.



interest, which was unlike their contributions to the library itself as a non-profit organisation. The sum needed was to be raised by subscription, in shares of £10 each, with each proprietor subscribing “for as many shares as they please”.<sup>36</sup> The committee sent out a letter on 8 November 1811 to all proprietors asking for contributions, giving a list of illustrious local worthies who had already subscribed to shares for the building, including the Right Hon. [John Parker], Lord Boringdon (first Earl of Morley, at nearby Saltram House), DCL, FRS, with five shares at £50, and Sir William Elford, FRS, five shares £50.<sup>37</sup> Such names were used to attract other subscribers to the building, allowing less elevated subscribers to enhance their social standing by association,<sup>38</sup> but also because supporting the public library in this way contributed to the public good of the city. The proprietors must have raised the required sum of £2,720 quickly, as the foundation stone was laid six months later, on 19 May 1812.

In the end, the proprietors built a structure significantly beyond their initial means. The finished building, including the interiors, exceeded the estimate of £2,720 by a large sum: the building, without the price of the land, amounted to £4,515, a hugely high sum by any standards. By comparison, Hull Subscription Library’s bespoke building cost £1,850 in 1812, the library building in Tavistock £914, while the splendid Manchester Portico exceeded all of these by far as it was erected at the cost of £6,881 in 1806.<sup>39</sup> Extraordinary meetings of Plymouth Public Library proprietors in 1812–13 were concerned with how to pay off

36 PWDRO, ‘Minute Book’, 5 May 1812.

37 The list of subscribers named in the letter of November 1811 reads: “Right Hon. Lord Boringdon, 5 shares, Sir William Elford, 5 shares, G. Eastlake, 5 shares, E. Lockyer, 5 shares, J.C. Langmead, 5 shares, S. Fuge, 3 shares, R. Fuge, 3 shares, B. Fuge, 3 shares, S.L. Hammick, 3 shares, W. Woollcombe, 3 shares, H. Herbert, 3 shares, G. Eastlake, Junr, 3 shares, G. Forsyth, 5 shares, R. Gurney, 3 shares, G. Herbert, Junr., 3 shares, H. Woollcombe, 3 shares, W. Langmead, 3 shares, T. Grigg, 3 shares, H. Gandy, 3 shares, Rees and Curtis, 3 shares, E. Lockyer Junr., 5 shares”.

38 Peter Clark suggests that clubs and societies aimed to recruit members of the nobility “to bring fashionable kudos to a respectable society, with an eye to bolstering recruitment”; *British Clubs and Societies, 1580–1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 211; for similar tactics, see Allan, *Nation of Readers*, pp. 68–71.

39 <http://www.theportico.org.uk/library/history> [accessed 9 October 2015]; Allan, ‘The Advantages of Literature’, 109; *A Catalogue of the Books in the Tavistock Public Subscription Library* (Tavistock: Peaston, 1822), p. 8.

the debt remaining for the building. The measures eventually adopted, after much discussion, included an increase of the number of proprietors, and the payment of an extra £20 before 31 of December 1813 by every proprietor.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, like many large subscription libraries, the new building included sections that could be let out to subsidise the library's income; in this case, eight "convenient cellars, for merchants and traders".<sup>41</sup>

In spite of these measures, the debt was not cleared until decades later. Prize agencies brought quick, but fleeting wealth. After the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, Plymouth had to rebuild the commercial activities of the port that had been neglected during the wars: there had been no need for trade as "war brought things into the port without risk to the merchant".<sup>42</sup> When these channels of income were closed, all classes suffered.<sup>43</sup> The town realised it was overspending on building projects and started to cut back.<sup>44</sup> Money might not have been an issue during the planning stages and at the beginning of the erection of the building, but it had become one by the end of the wars. The cost of the building could therefore not immediately be met, which meant the building continued to dominate discussion of how funds were spent in the ensuing years.<sup>45</sup>

40 PWDRO, 'Minute Book', 12 and 18 December 1812, 23 January 1813, 12 June 1813, 10 and 24 September 1813, 19 November 1813, 3 and 17 December 1813.

41 PWDRO, 'Notice for "Eight new-built cellars, under the public library, in Cornwall-street, Plymouth... Effectually secured from by Arches from Danger by Fire"'. The proposals for the Liverpool Athenaeum similarly mentioned the rental it hopes to accrue from the cellars underneath the library building; *Outlines of a Plan for a Library and News-Room*, 22 November 1797; reprinted in Neville Carrick and Edward L. Ashton, *The Athenaeum Liverpool, 1797–1997* (Liverpool: Athenaeum Liverpool, 1997), pp. 45–47, at p. 46. Many thanks to Mark Towsey for sharing this material.

42 Gill, *Plymouth*, p. 199.

43 Worth, *History of Plymouth*, p. 237–38.

44 Gill, *Plymouth*, p. 206.

45 In the section on 'The Funds of the Institution' in the earliest extant catalogue of 1824, the "purchase of books, newspapers, and other publications" is item 4. Under item 1 the necessary wages, repairs, and taxes are discussed, while item 2 and 3 both refer to the loan taken to erect the building: the funds should be used "to the discharge of the interest of the loan", and "to the application of a sum annually ... towards the extinction of the principal of the loan"; *Laws of the Plymouth Public Library*, p. vi. The title itself makes clear that the laws are at least as important as the catalogue of books.

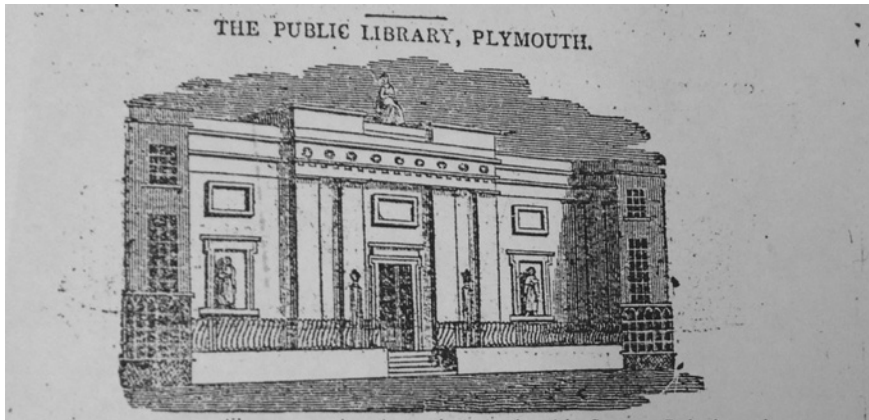


FIGURE 11.2 Plymouth Public Library, engraving in *The Monthly Magazine*, 1814 based on John Foulston's watercolour.<sup>46</sup>

### Library as Status Symbol

In the early years then, prestige was the primary concern in the founding of the library. In a town grown large and rich through years of naval wars, the gentlemen of Plymouth required a library building worthy of their aims and wealth. The building needed to represent Plymouth as a civilised and cultured town of national and international significance, a town that valued books and learning highly. On the one hand then, the grandeur of the building embodied proprietors' notions about the significance of books and learning, while on the other, it was an "articulate statement...about the importance of the institution, and perhaps, of its proprietors, rendered unmistakably in fine masonry".<sup>47</sup> As Alistair Black, Simon Pepper and Kaye Bagshaw summarise in their study of public library buildings following the 1850 Act, erecting "a monumental building promotes the institution it houses by suggesting a pedigree".<sup>48</sup>

46 'The Public Library, Plymouth', *The Monthly Magazine*, No.254 (1 May 1814), Part 4, vol 37, pp. 293–94, p. 294. An engraving based on Foulston's drawing of the library (the original drawing is held by Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery).

47 David Allan: "The Advantages of Literature", p. 109. On ideas about the book being represented in architectural features, see also James Raven, 'From Promotion to Proscription: Arrangements for Reading and Eighteenth-Century Libraries', in James Raven, Helen Small, and Naomi Tadmor (eds.), *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 275–01, at p. 176.

48 Alistair Black, Simon Pepper and Kaye Bagshaw, *Books, Buildings and Social Engineering: Early Public Libraries in Britain from Past to Present* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p. 344.

Commissioning Foulston as the architect helped emphasise the library's status. At the time he was London-based, and had been the architect for the Hotel and Theatre. The Foundation Stone lists him as "John Foulston, of London, Architect", emphasising the cachet of the metropolis. He later moved to Plymouth and became the region's foremost architect, supported by the leading men of the town. The front of Foulston's library building has no windows (see Figure 11.2); instead, the reading rooms are lighted from the roof, as was fashionable, by a "highly ornamental" cupola (see Figure 11.3).<sup>49</sup> The erection of such a building within three years of the institution's founding was made possible by the ambition and the wealth of the founders.

The library was designed as a status symbol for a major national seaport, emphasising the enormous amounts of money its founders could command, as well as foregrounding the city's interest in scientific and literary culture. In particular, the library served as the new face of Plymouth's increasingly sophisticated book culture, with a town that could sustain only a single printer in 1783 boasting no less than eleven printers and booksellers by 1814.<sup>50</sup> The author of *The Tourist's Companion* of 1823 was positively surprised that in spite of Plymouth's naval base and commerce there was interest in culture:

With respect to literature, in general it is not to be expected to prevail much in a sea-port, amidst the enterprise of commercial speculations.... We are happy, however, to be able to notice some recent instances, which shew that taste for it is not wanting, and efforts to show itself have been manifested in the erection of a public Library in Cornwall-street.<sup>51</sup>

The founding of a public library and the lavishing of funds on an expensive library building evidently went some way to dispel assumptions about the naval town's lack of interest in literary culture, and attested, as was its founders' design, to "the intellectual character of, at least, a fair proportion of the town", the city's importance, its wealth, its civic pride and its leading men's philanthropic aims for public good.<sup>52</sup>

49 'Public Library, Plymouth', in *South Devon Monthly Museum*, 1.1 (1 January 1833), pp. 1–3, at p. 2.

50 Worth, *History of Plymouth*, p. 243.

51 Anon., *The Tourist's Companion; Being a Guide to the Towns of Plymouth, Plymouth-Dock, Stonehouse, Morice-Town, Stoke, and their Vicinities: The Breakwater, Naval Arsenal, and Other Remarkable Objects. With a Directory of the Principal Trades People* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1823), p. 9.

52 George Wightwick, *Nettleton's Guide to Plymouth, Stonehouse and Devonport* (Plymouth: 1836), p. 20.



FIGURE 11.3 The Reading Room of Plymouth Public Library, *Watercolour by John Foulston, ca. 1812.*

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### The Founders and their Aims

While many subscription libraries were strongholds of middle-class respectability, the social standing of all of Plymouth's proprietors was extremely high. Local aristocracy were among the proprietors. Politician and artist William Elford, Baronet, was on the committee that oversaw the erection of the new building. John Lord Boringdon and Jonathan Elford, son of William, were also on the committee for the library from its very first year.<sup>53</sup> An important group among the wealthy of Plymouth at the time were prize agents, such as John Hawker, mayor 1805–6, and also Edmund Lockyer, who had been mayor in 1803–4. Lockyer in particular was a well-known and respected prize-agent, who many ship captains entrusted to handle prize money arising from the capture of French or Spanish ships.<sup>54</sup> As being a prize agent also involved risks, for

53 The older local aristocracy across the river in Cornwall, the Carew-Poles and the Edgcombuses, did not get involved in the library.

54 There are many examples in newspapers of notices of prizes that his office will distribute, sometimes in conjunction with a London firm; for examples, see *The London Gazette*, 10 November, 1801, and *Hampshire Telegraph*, 20 July 1801.

example where money needed to be paid back when a ship turned out to have been captured illegally (usually if a captain could prove that his captured ship was not French or Spanish, or trading with France or Spain), these men needed to be of substantial independent means. Many of the library's proprietors profited in some way from the wars, such as George Eastlake (mayor 1819–20), who was judge-advocate and solicitor to the Admiralty (his son Charles became the celebrated painter). The *Picture of Plymouth* (1812) noted that Eastlake had been "indefatigable in his exertions to promote" the library, and he was chiefly remembered after his death for his "exertions" in "the formation of an institution, at once so honourable and useful to his native town".<sup>55</sup>

Professional-class proprietors included doctors, clergymen, publishers and justices of the peace. In 1810, the year of the library's founding, Dr Edmund Lockyer, Jr. (son of the prize agent) was mayor, one of several eminent medical men among the proprietors. Another was William Woollcombe, physician to the Countess of St Germans, and the first Registrar of the library. Although men of the cloth were unusually thin on the ground, Anglican clergyman the Revd John Bidlake was involved, known primarily for his role as schoolmaster at Plymouth grammar school and whose published verse and sermons sought "to be accessible to a non-intellectual readership".<sup>56</sup> Becoming a member of an institution which aimed to disseminate knowledge therefore fitted his educational ideals. Among proprietors were also publishers and booksellers, such as Benjamin Robert Haydon (1758–1813), who was a printer, publisher and bookseller in Plymouth as well as father of the soon-to-be famous painter (who had been taught as a young boy at Bidlake's grammar school).<sup>57</sup> Another highly respected proprietor was Joseph Pridham (mayor 1809–10), whose vigilance during his time as Justice of the Peace was lauded in the local press.<sup>58</sup> Of the

55 *Picture of Plymouth* (1812), p. 18; 'Public Library, Plymouth', p. 1.

56 Nigel Aston, 'Bidlake, John (1755–1814)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/2366>, accessed 6 November 2014].

57 'Register of the Shares of the Public Library at Plymouth', 1814. For his dates and occupation see the DNB entry for his son by Robert Woof: 'Haydon, Benjamin Robert (1786–1846)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/12750>, accessed 10 March 2015].

58 For example, *The Exeter Flying Post* of 5 October 1809 praised Justice Pridham for having prevented "an intended duel, or an affair of honor, between two respectable physicians of this town, Dr Gasking and Dr Bellamy ... [Pridham's constables] seized all the parties, with their pistols, and carried them to the Guildhall, where, after some conversation, Dr G. made an apology to Dr B. and they were dismissed with suitable admonition from the chief magistrate".

twenty-one proprietors who formed the library's committee in the first year, ten were mayor at some point in the 1790s, 1800s or 1810s.<sup>59</sup> Overall, then, the early proprietors of Plymouth Public Library were very wealthy men, many of whom were already involved in local building projects and the city's civic offices.

Unlike Bristol and Liverpool, whose libraries have been studied in detail, the slave trade does not seem to have been a primary source for Plymouth's prosperity. By the eighteenth century, Plymouth, like virtually all British ports, played some part in the trade, but this was largely as a customs point for goods from the Americas that were to be re-exported to Europe.<sup>60</sup> In terms of numbers of slaving vessels dispatched, Liverpool, Bristol and London were by far the leading ports.<sup>61</sup> Consequently, while in Liverpool for example all the mayors came from families involved in the trade,<sup>62</sup> this was not the case for Plymouth. Instead, as we have seen, Plymouth's real wealth was generated by its strategically important naval base; notably, the early proprietors' family names do not feature among those compensated for the loss of their slaves after the emancipation act of 1833.<sup>63</sup>

Nevertheless, several prominent library members, including William Elford and Henry Woollcombe, were also involved in the Plymouth committee for the abolition of slavery,<sup>64</sup> while the library's holdings suggest a keen interest

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- 59 The 21 proprietors who formed the committee in the first year were Dr Edmund Lockyer, Jr. M.D. (Mayor 1810–11), Joseph Pridham, Justice, (Mayor 1809–10), Dr William Woollcombe, M.D., John Clark Langmead (Mayor 1802–3), Rev Dr Bidlake, Peter Tonkin, John Harris, Junr., Jonathan Elford, Thomas Cleather (Mayor 1813–14), Edmund Lockyer (Mayor 1803–4), Henry Woollcombe (Mayor 1813–14), Robert Fuge, John Hawker (Mayor 1805–6), John Arthur (Mayor 1812–13), William Langmead (Mayor 1808–9), John Tingcombe, George Herbert, Jr., Samuel Fuge, Joseph Cookworthy, William Prance, Jr., and George Eastlake (Mayor 1819–20).
- 60 Kenneth Morgan, *Slavery, Atlantic Trade and the British Economy, 1660–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 84. For Bristol's early participation in the trade, see Basil Morgan, 'Hawkins, Sir John (1532–1595)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Oct 2007 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/12672>, accessed 10 Sept 2015].
- 61 Morgan, *Slavery*, pp. 88–92.
- 62 William St Clair, *The Grand Slave Emporium* (London: Profile, 2006), p. 87.
- 63 See the compensation database at UCL: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/> [last accessed 12 October 2015]. I am grateful to Mark Towsey for suggesting this route of enquiry.
- 64 Richard Huzzey, 'Abolitionist Petitioning in Plymouth', unpublished paper delivered at Plymouth University, 14 January 2014. I am very grateful to Richard for sharing his materials.

in debates about abolition. The earliest surviving catalogue of 1824 shows the library held texts by leading abolitionists Thomas Clarkson and James Stephen (*History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-trade by the British Parliament* (1808) and *The Slavery of the British West India Colonies Delineated* (1824) respectively), as well as the *Memoirs of Granville Sharp* (1820) by Prince Hoare. Carl Wadstroem's *Essay on Colonisation* (1794) was also present, which suggested trading with rather than enslaving Africans, as was the key Enlightenment disquisition on the matter, the Abbé Raynal's *Philosophical and Political History of the Settlements and Trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies* ([1770], 1798). Other texts in the catalogue that described the brutality and harsh realities of slavery included John Stedman's popular *Narrative, of a Five Years' Expedition, Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (published by the radical Joseph Johnson in 1796, with engravings by William Blake and others; the library owned the 1806 edition), and Marcus Rainsford's *Historical Account of the Black Empire of Hayti* (1805), with its admiring accounts of revolutionary leader Toussaint L'Ouverture. The only text in the collection by an anti-abolitionist seems to be Bryan Edwards's popular *History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies* ([1793], 1807), but there were no more recent defences of slavery. Many of these titles also featured in the catalogues of other large port towns, for example that of the Bristol Library Society, while the Liverpool Athenaeum held fewer of them.<sup>65</sup> The holdings at Plymouth therefore do not mean that the purchasing committee, the proprietors or the subscribers were all abolitionists, but they show that many of them were interested in current affairs and in the discussion of reformist ideas.

More specific to Plymouth seems to have been an interest in publications on Napoleon: the catalogues at Bristol (1814) and the Liverpool Athenaeum (1820) appear to list only one and no title respectively specifically on him, whereas Plymouth held several, and listed them in more than one place to ensure they could be found by a reader.<sup>66</sup> For example, there were three entries for E.A.D.

65 *Catalogue of the Books belonging to the Bristol Library Society* (Bristol: Gutch, 1814); *Catalogue of the Library of the Athenaeum, Liverpool, by George Burrell, Principal Librarian* (Liverpool: Harris & Co, 1820). Of the authors mentioned above, Bristol held Clarkson, Wadstroem, Raynal, Stedman, Rainford, and Edwards. The Liverpool Athenaeum held Clarkson, Raynal, Stedman, and Edwards.

66 Bristol held Napoleon's *Intercepted Letters* (1798–1800). For holdings at Plymouth, see the 1824 catalogue, which includes Las Cases' *Journal* and the *Code Napoleon* in both English and French.



Las Cases's 1823 *Memorial de Sainte Helene: Journal of the Private Life and Conversations of the Emperor Napoleon at Saint Helena*, under B, L and N: 'Bonaparte, Las Cases's Private Life of', 'Las Cases's Journal at St. Helena', and 'Napoleon, Las Cases's Journal of the Private Life of'. The importance of Napoleon to the city, Plymouth's role in the Napoleonic Wars, and Napoleon's stay in the Plymouth Sound in the summer of 1815 before his journey to St Helena, were therefore reflected in the library holdings. Furthermore, the library seems to have purchased the famous painting by Charles Eastlake, 'Napoleon Bonaparte on Board the 'Bellerophon' in the Plymouth Sound', 1815, which, while it also shows the proprietors to be patronising the son of one of the founding members, testifies to their interest in Napoleon.<sup>67</sup>

The annual fees of the library required its proprietors to have deep pockets. Each proprietor was expected to pay on entry the staggeringly high sum of thirty guineas "to the Capital of the Establishment", as well as one Guinea annually "towards the General Support of the Institution".<sup>68</sup> The fee to become a proprietor was reduced from thirty guineas in 1810 to twenty in 1813, presumably to attract more proprietors at a time when funds were urgently and immediately needed for the building, but even twenty Guineas remained a very high sum. Contemporary subscription libraries usually charged much less for their admission fee, or initial capital investment, at times as little as half a guinea (York Subscription Library), often a guinea (for example Tavistock Subscription Library), at times "four of five guineas", and occasionally ten guineas (Liverpool Athenaeum 1799, Hull Subscription Library 1820).<sup>69</sup> These figures put the thirty guineas Plymouth Library charged into perspective, and make its success stand out even more. This was an extremely grand institution founded in a rich town, with a large, prosperous and ambitious middle class keen to support this new institution. These enormous sums helped fund the lavish new library building, especially as the high admission fees did not leave the institution short of members. In the initial 1810 meeting, the aim was set at fifty proprietors, but this was adjusted up repeatedly and by December 1813 the

67 Gerald Hamilton-Edwards, *Twelve Men of Plymouth* (Plymouth: printed for the author, 1951), p. 65. Many thanks to James Gregory for sharing his knowledge on Eastlake and Napoleon. The painting is now in the Royal Museums at Greenwich.

68 PPLA, 'Minute Book', 18 December 1810.

69 Kelly, *Early Public Libraries*, p. 128; St Clair, *Reading Nation*, pp. 667–68, Forster and Bell, 'Subscription Libraries', p. 151. Crawford has shown that in Scotland, average entry fees to middle-class subscription libraries were "about a guinea and the annual subscription about 6 s."; 'The high state', pp. 182–83; Anon., 'Tavistock Subscription Library', typed late mss, p. 2.

number of shares was finally capped 204, where it remained until well into the twentieth century.<sup>70</sup> Again then, proprietors' understanding of 'public' focused on public good, but also, importantly, on public prestige and civic pride.

### Gender, Class and Philanthropy

An important aspect of proprietors' understanding of a public library was its disinterested reach beyond the circle of very wealthy men, moving us closer to the modern, more inclusive understanding of 'public'. Accordingly, becoming a proprietor was not the only means of access to this new institution. From its very first meeting, the library emphasised "the dissemination of knowledge" as one of its key aims, opening up access to women and to those who would not have been able to afford the prohibitive membership fees.<sup>71</sup>

Many middle-class women had indirect access to the holdings of subscription libraries across the nation through their male relatives, who could get books for them. At times, the wives and daughters of members had access to the reading rooms, such as at the Manchester Portico Library, where the 1806 laws stated that "the Library and Reading Room shall be open to the Ladies of the respective families of the subscribers", but where, as Shirley Foster points out, women "could not borrow books".<sup>72</sup>

While Manchester debarred women from becoming proprietors – a rule the Portico had in common with most clubs and societies at the time, as Peter Clark has shown – some subscription libraries allowed women to become full members in their own right.<sup>73</sup> While the 1810 laws stated that "*persons* residing

70 The surviving 'Register of the Shares of the Publick Library at Plymouth' lists the 204 initial proprietors, followed by the subsequent history of each of these shares throughout the nineteenth century; the transfer date(s) of each share and the person(s) the share was transferred to, as well as the mode of transfer (usually 'bequest', less often 'sale'). PWDRO, 'Register of the Shares of the Publick Library at Plymouth with the Names of the Proprietors' (1814 onwards). Several newspaper advertisements survive that advertise the sale of a share. The centenary booklet on 'Plymouth Proprietary Library', published in 1910, still says that 'the property of the institution is held in 204 shares' (p. 1).

71 PPLA, 'Minute Book', 18 December 1810.

72 Shirley Forster, "We sit and read and ream our time away": Elizabeth Gaskell and the Portico Library', *Gaskell Society Journal*, 14 (2000), pp. 14–23, p. 15.

73 Emma Marigliano, 'A City Library for a City Gent: The Making of The Portico Library', conference paper delivered at 'Collecting Texts and Manuscripts, 1660–1860', Plymouth University, 16–17 April 2015. For membership of eighteenth-century associations and

in Plymouth, Dock, or Stonehouse ... be admitted, as Annual Subscribers" [my emphasis], the 1824 catalogue clarifies that "persons" were defined as either men or women:

Ladies or Gentlemen shall be admissible, by ballot of the majority of the Committee, to become Members of the Institution, under the name of Annual Subscribers, and thereby to be entitled to the use of the Library and News-Room, jointly or separately, according to the following conditions and rates of subscription: viz., Three Guineas annually for the use of the Library (exclusively of the News-Room) and the privilege of receiving books from it ... and Four Guineas, annually, for similar privileges, together with the use of the News-Room.<sup>74</sup>

The register of shares of Plymouth Public Library also gives evidence of women as library proprietors. This is particularly significant as usually, in societies of the period, "even where women were admitted, [...] power usually rested with the men".<sup>75</sup> At Plymouth however, while the initial 204 proprietors were all male, shares were transferred to women as early as 1814. For example, Benjamin Haydon's share was transferred to his daughter Harriet Cobley Haydon (the painter's sister, later Harriet Haviland, 1798–1884) in 1814, after her father's death in 1813. This is all the more remarkable because we know Haydon had a son, so it was by choice not necessity that his share was transferred to a woman. Similarly, Andrew Saunders's share was transferred to Priscilla Saunders in 1815.<sup>76</sup> While the laws show that female proprietors had a different status – for example, the 1824 laws specified that at general meetings "no proprietor (except ladies) [is] allowed to vote by proxy" – the fact that women are being taken into account and can vote, shows awareness of female proprietors.<sup>77</sup>

Although proprietors' understanding of 'public' ensured an enlightened interest in making knowledge available to women as well as men, class

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societies, see Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, especially pp. 130–31; 198–204. In 1803–4, for example, "only 5 percent of English benefit societies were listed as female clubs" (p. 198).

74 *Laws of the Plymouth Public Library*, pp. x–xi.

75 Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, p. 198.

76 'Register of the Shares', pp. 16–17. Haydon's share was number forty-seven, Saunders' number seventy-eight.

77 *Catalogue* (1824), p. iii.

remained a greater hindrance to access to the Plymouth Public Library than gender. In 1810 proprietors decided to admit individuals as annual subscribers only, “at Two Guineas per annum, as a Reader, both in the library and news room, at Three Guineas per annum”.<sup>78</sup> These readers did not, therefore, have to pay the high admission fee, but even a subscription fee of two guineas a year excluded the majority of the population, with working-class men earning between nine and, very exceptionally forty shillings a week in this period.<sup>79</sup> The annual subscription sum of two to three guineas was at the upper end of what subscription libraries around this time charged, though more in line with customs elsewhere than Plymouth’s admissions fee.<sup>80</sup> Nevertheless, it is important to note that like other elite subscription libraries, Plymouth Public Library put measures in place that allowed access to the institution’s books for readers further down the social scale. The practice of admitting readers as annual subscribers who did not have to pay the high admissions fee in addition to the annual subscription, fits in with the library’s aims of facilitating access to knowledge in the provinces, and remained in place over subsequent decades.

Admitting readers who were not proprietors and therefore did not own shares was an important step in shaping the library’s community function and impact. This library was, in part, a philanthropic enterprise, and can be seen in light of early nineteenth-century debates about poverty, access to education, and the role of self-improving reading in unlocking social mobility – debates that followed on from the French Revolution and, in Andrew Hubbell’s words,

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78 PPLA, ‘Minute Book’, 18 December 1810. The subscription fee had gone up to 3 guineas for the library and four for the library and newsroom by 1824; *Catalogue* (1824), p. xi.

79 Kathryn Sutherland, “Events...have made us a world of readers”: Reader Relations, 1780–1830’, in David B. Pirie (ed.) *The Romantic Period* (London: Penguin Books, 1994), pp. 1–48, at p. 9.

80 Kelly, *Early Public Libraries*, p. 128 (the annual subscription around 1800 was about “ten shillings or more”); St Clair, *Reading Nation*, pp. 667–68 (e.g. Hull Subscription Library, one guinea annually in 1820; York Subscription Library, one guinea in 1794). Selkirk Subscription Library allowed non-members access for half a guinea annually; Mark Towsey, “Store their minds with much valuable knowledge”: Agricultural Improvement at the Selkirk Subscription Library, 1799–1814’, *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 38.4 (December 2015), pp. 569–82, at p. 571. Later in the century, e.g. Hull Subscription Library charged £31 6 s. as annual subscription in 1856, Lynn Subscription Library one guinea; see H. Davies, ‘Using ‘Public’ Libraries in Victorian England’, in *One Hundred Years: A Collection to Celebrate the Library Association Centenary* (Aberystwyth: College of Librarianship, 1977), pp. 47–68, at p. 54.

demarcated “the divide between political economists and paternalists”.<sup>81</sup> Peter Clark has shown that motivating factors for joining clubs and societies in eighteenth-century Britain usually included “serious public-spirited motives” as well as “self interest” (such as personal improvement or social mobility).<sup>82</sup> As James Raven states in his study of the New York Society Library and the Laurenziana at Florence, the “troubling question always remained” as to how ‘public’ these libraries were to be.<sup>83</sup> At Plymouth, proprietors decided that each could nominate “one Young Man to the Library, between the Age of Fifteen and Twenty-One Years, as a Reader”.<sup>84</sup> There is no evidence as to whether or not this happened in practice and the clause disappeared from the rules in the 1824 catalogue.

There are, however, instances where readers were admitted who could not pay the annual subscription fee. For example, John Kitto (1804–54), who became deaf following an accident when being apprenticed to his father’s trade as a stonemason, spent much of his adolescence in the workhouse.<sup>85</sup> However, his “superior abilities” were noted by chance in a local bookshop by George Harvey, who interested himself and other members of the library on Kitto’s behalf, so that the young man was removed from the workhouse in 1823, “that he might be enabled to give his time to reading and study, with the privilege of being allowed to visit the Public Library”.<sup>86</sup>

Philanthropy and the provision of access to knowledge beyond the wealthy, even down to the very poor in exceptional instances, was therefore a founding principle. Nonetheless, it also contributed to proprietors’ own social standing that they did not keep the library as a stronghold for themselves but admitted readers who were much less wealthy, thereby raising subscribers’ social status but also furthering the general dissemination of knowledge. As James Raven argues, “questions of access and of the construction of class identities should not be devalued”.<sup>87</sup> By allowing subscribers and good causes into the library,

81 J. Andrew Hubbell, ‘Wordsworth’s Excursion in Romantic Philanthropy’, *European Romantic Review*, 18.1 (2007), pp. 43–68, at p. 46.

82 Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, p. 490.

83 James Raven, ‘The Representation of Philanthropy and Reading in the Eighteenth-Century Library’, *Libraries and the Cultural Record*, 31.2 (1996), pp. 492–510, at p. 507.

84 PPLA, ‘Minute Book’, 18 December 1810.

85 Thomas Hamilton, ‘Kitto, John (1804–1854)’, rev. H.C.G. Matthew, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/15694>, accessed 28 April 2015].

86 J.E. Ryland, *Memoirs of John Kitto, D.D., F.S.A.* (Edinburgh: W. Oliphant, 1856), pp. 76, 78.

87 Raven, ‘Libraries for Sociability’, p. 259.

proprietors demonstrated that their own superior social status had enabled them to become benefactors. From the start, they saw the library as “an important advantage to the towns of Plymouth, Dock, Stonehouse and the surrounding country”.<sup>88</sup> Plymouth Public Library enhanced the prestige of Plymouth and its leading citizens, and a key factor that contributed to the proprietors’ and the institution’s status was the benevolent act of making the diffusion of knowledge possible beyond the circle of the very wealthy.

### Conclusion

To conclude then, the five driving factors that emerged in the initial meeting of 1810 – prestige and prosperity, Plymouth’s place in a national context, the accumulation of useful works rather than ephemeral ones, and a moral and social motivation connected to the provincial location – determined that the Plymouth Public Library was as much about status as it was about books. In a large town made prosperous by years of naval warfare, the gentlemen of Plymouth required a building for their library that was worthy of their ambition and wealth. They built a grand structure but went over budget in doing so. The wives, daughters, and sisters of the proprietors would indirectly borrow books through their male relatives’ accounts, but women could also, importantly, become subscribers or even proprietors in their own right. Proprietors’ philanthropic ideals meant they granted library access to readers who were outside the circle of the very wealthy. While this also raised proprietors’ own status and emphasised their role as benefactors to the city and its people, it shaped the community function of the library and ensured that elevating and improving books reached further in local society than they would otherwise have done. At the time of its founding, the Public Library’s role was to serve the city’s public good and public prestige. By the time Plymouth Public Library was renamed Plymouth Proprietary Library, in 1881, the understanding of ‘public’ was different, so that on the one hand, the name change can be seen as a reaction to the newly founded public library, free at the point of use following the 1850 Act, but on the other, the new name also signified the change in the meaning of ‘public’.<sup>89</sup>

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88 PWDRO, ‘Minute Book’, 20 November 1810.

89 Plymouth Public Library changed its name to Plymouth Proprietary Library in 1881: “At the Annual General Meeting of the Proprietors it was resolved that the Title of the

Its founders designed the new library as a status symbol for the whole town, emphasising the enormous amounts of money they could command, but also affirming that Plymouth's citizens were willing to spend this money on spreading literary culture. One reason for the grandeur of their enterprise may have been that the library was set up relatively late in comparison to similar institutions elsewhere, so that the proprietors felt the need to ensure that Plymouth featured prominently on the cultural map of the Atlantic World. Another, connected reason, was that the founders of the public library aimed to, and appear to have been successful in, dispelling assumptions about the negligible cultural ambitions of Plymouth as a naval town: while contemporary stereotypes held that "literature ... is not to be expected to prevail much in a sea-port",<sup>90</sup> the establishment of the library meant that twenty years after its foundation, this sea-port could be "proud of [its] distinction as a literary place. In this respect, Plymouth may venture to claim precedence with most of the provincial towns in the kingdom".<sup>91</sup>

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Institution be changed by omitting the Term 'Public' and designating it as 'The Plymouth Proprietary Library'; 'Register of the Shares', p. 4. The first Plymouth free public library had been founded in 1876.

90 Anon., *The Tourist's Companion*, p. 9.

91 'Public Library, Plymouth', p. 1.

## Reading on the Edge of the Atlantic: The Easton Library Company

*Christopher N. Phillips*

As his final act as the Easton Library Company's first president, the Revd Christian Endress gave his annual report to the shareholders on 2 May 1812. Endress offered a vision of what the board hoped its collection would do:

In the selection made by the board, we thought proper to lay the foundation of an institution that might inform the mind, enlighten the understanding, and engage the attention and diligence of the reader. We procured the best books that we knew of, and our funds would afford, in natural theology, natural and modern Philosophy, ancient and modern History of Church and State, Geography, Biography, the Science of Politics, Agriculture and Mechanics.<sup>1</sup>

Endress's survey of the library's key genres underscores the influence of the ELC's model, the Library Company of Philadelphia. The ELC's founders saw themselves as participating in the tradition of Benjamin Franklin and his fellow luminaries; indeed, the town of Easton had been founded in 1752 by William Parsons, a member of Franklin's Junto and the LCP's second librarian. Endress and his fellow ELC members hoped that their Pennsylvania market town of 1,600 would follow that larger city in pursuing cosmopolitan ideals of culture, learning and reason. Using a booklist that showed considerable overlap with the LCP, the Charleston Library Society, the Sheffield Subscription Library, the Bristol Library and other well-known examples, the ELC sought to participate in an Atlantic world that used shared reading, sociability and self-education as vehicles for creating an enlightened middle class.

Yet the ELC's version of enlightenment was far from that of Voltaire, Diderot or Hume, and even as it sought to challenge and expand its members' minds, it also made a key concession to the desire for pleasure reading. Endress

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1 Easton Area Public Library, Records and Documents of the East Library Company, 'Minute Book for the Board of Directors, 1811–1893', pp. 37–38.



continued in his address: "Going into the field of Fancy, we selected the most generally noted, the most valuable and least exceptionable works, in poetry & prose, that might infuse into the mind, not yet accustomed to the yoke of solid study, at least a general love of reading".<sup>2</sup> Not everyone was ready for enlightenment, obviously, and the inclusion of imaginative works – at least ones that were deemed "valuable" and "least exceptionable" – was a worthwhile investment in presumably younger readers who might one day turn to the more rigorous selections of the library. The ELC was a shareholding library and shareholders' families made extensive use of materials, both in borrowing them directly and in sharing books at home. There were thus local realities of family reading to take into account, and these local realities reflected the push-and-pull that libraries throughout the Atlantic world were experiencing in the midst of what scholars have come to see as the age of the novel.<sup>3</sup>

The ELC was founded with the sale of a hundred shares in a signal year in Easton's history.<sup>4</sup> The city's first English-speaking church, First Presbyterian, was also established that year, a milestone for a demographic shift that had been accelerating since American Independence. In 1780 Easton was a town of 500 residents, most of whom were German-speaking; increased immigration from the British Isles and from coastal US cities into Pennsylvania's Northampton County (where Easton was the county seat) fed considerable demographic and cultural change.<sup>5</sup> By 1811, Endress had begun holding English services at the Lutheran church he pastored,<sup>6</sup> and Christian Hutter had founded a bilingual newspaper in Easton,<sup>7</sup> with German and English appearing side-by-side just as books in either language shared space in his bookshop. Mary Ralston, born Maria Endress (the pastor's sister), had begun a girls' academy the same year, offering instruction in English. Ralston, Endress, Hutter, and Samuel

<sup>2</sup> 'Minute Book', pp. 37–38.

<sup>3</sup> Rob Koehler gives a parallel account of a library board's goals regarding library members' appetite for fiction; see Chapter 8.

<sup>4</sup> The fullest history of the ELC to date is Jane S. Moyer, 'History of Library Services', in Jere Knight (ed.), *Two Hundred Years of Life in Northampton County, Pa.*, 11 volumes (Easton, PA: Northampton County Bicentennial Commission, 1976), iv.1–18, especially. iv.3–6.

<sup>5</sup> Ethan Allen Weaver, *"The Forks of the Delaware" Illustrated* (Easton, PA, 1901), p. xxxiii; Liam Riordan, *Many Identities, One Nation: The Revolution and Its Legacy in the Mid-Atlantic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), p. 29.

<sup>6</sup> Alexander Waldenrath, 'The Lutheran Church', in *Two Hundred Years of Life in Northampton County*, ii.37–49, at ii.40.

<sup>7</sup> Alfred L. Shoemaker, *A Checklist of Imprints of the German Press in Northampton County, Pennsylvania, 1766–1905, With Biographies of the Printers* (Easton, PA: Northampton County Historical and Genealogical Society, 1943), pp. 5–6. See also Knight (ed.), *Two Hundred Years of Life in Northampton County*, i.170–72.

Sitgreaves, who would sponsor the founding of Easton's Episcopal congregation a few years later, were all charter members of the ELC. In a period when German in eastern Pennsylvania was seen increasingly as provincial rather than cosmopolitan, even the many bilingual shareholders of the ELC sought to reach across the Atlantic in English; the library's collection, with a few notable exceptions, ignored German imports and German-language publications in favour of works written or translated into English.<sup>8</sup>

Yet Easton's approach to the kind of reading called 'rational entertainment' at the time differed in important regards from that in Philadelphia, Charleston, or even Selkirk. While Hume's and Robertson's histories were some of the ELC's most popular works, especially early on, Easton readers did not follow these historical works to Hume's philosophical writings, or to very much Enlightenment philosophy of any sort.<sup>9</sup> Hume's philosophical writings were never in the ELC's collection, and while copies of Adam Ferguson, Dugald Stewart, Thomas Reid, James Beattie and other eighteenth-century philosophers were on the shelves, most were hardly borrowed – only Beattie's ten-volume *Works* managed over twenty-five loans in the library's first decade, with a three-volume edition of Locke's *Essay on Human Understanding* coming in second with twenty-three loans. While the history books favoured at the ELC may have been sought out for their ideas and information, in most cases this was likely in a 'rational entertainment' mode rather than in that of the 'serious study' that Endress had said in 1812 was the board's vision for the library.

In noting the uneven overlap with the Scottish libraries that Mark Towsey has studied, it is worth stating more directly what type of community Easton was. Located some eighty miles from the Atlantic shore, Easton relied on New York (seventy miles overland to the east) and more particularly Philadelphia (sixty miles down the river) for access to the larger Atlantic world, whether for commercial, political, cultural, or personal purposes. In the 1810s, American importation of British books slowed considerably due to the War of 1812, and the parallel rise of the American reprint publishing industry meant that many of the books that the LCP, the CLS, and the New York Society Library had no choice but to import in the colonial period were now available in Philadelphia

8 This attitude towards German language and culture was fairly new in the early nineteenth century, especially in more rural parts of Pennsylvania. On the place of German in colonial Pennsylvanians' ideals of cosmopolitanism, see Patrick M. Erben, *A Harmony of the Spirits: Translation and the Language of Community in Early Pennsylvania* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2012). For a recent analysis of the ethnic and cultural status of Germans in Revolution-era Northampton County, see Riordan, *Many Identities*.

9 This is in contrast to the rich variety of Enlightenment reading Mark Towsey has identified across the major and minor urban centers of Scotland; *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment: Books and Their Readers in Provincial Scotland, 1750–1820* (Boston: Brill, 2010).

or Boston imprints. Accordingly, the ELC worked exclusively with Philadelphia booksellers and their agents in the 1810s and 1820s.<sup>10</sup> While the ELC contributed to the effort to found Lafayette College in Easton in 1826 (twenty-three of the original twenty-six local trustees were ELC shareholders), the library was not intended to support a college, as the NYSL initially was. It was also not necessary for keeping up with the latest shipping, naval and political news out of London, as it was for merchant members of the CLS and the LCP, since Easton's merchants could get their shipping news from Philadelphia newspapers (to some of which the ELC subscribed) and conducted nearly all of their business with American firms. The balance of business and family, of nation and cosmopolis, was crucial for the ELC's functioning in a rapidly growing but still small city.

The balancing act mentioned earlier between 'Fancy' and 'serious study' is typically understood in library history as a tension between subscription or social libraries' emphasis on professionally oriented reading and the for-profit circulating libraries' reliance on contemporary fiction and other popular works.<sup>11</sup> The LCP, the most influential of the American subscription libraries by 1811, had explicitly rejected acquiring a large fiction collection some time before, considering such books too light for serious study.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the Philadelphia institution's 1807 printed catalogue, a copy of which the LCP presented to the ELC's board, gave a scant three pages to works of fiction compared to well over twenty for 'Civil History'. By contrast, the ELC's 1816 catalogue showed only a tiny fraction of the LCP's holdings (274 titles compared to 11,124 at LCP), but over sixteen percent of those titles were works of fiction. Among the 128 duodecimos, where almost all of the forty-eight fiction titles were classified, the percentage jumped to thirty-five percent. And that ratio would stay consistent over the years; the 1855 catalogue shows that some 325 titles, or over

10 For a helpful overview of this shift in the American book trade, see James N. Green, 'The Rise of Book Publishing', in Robert A. Gross and Mary Kelley (eds.), *A History of the Book in America, Volume 2: An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790–1840* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), pp. 75–127.

11 Kenneth E. Carpenter, 'Libraries', in Gross and Kelley (eds.), *A History of the Book in America Volume 2*, pp. 273–86. For a summary of the comparable British context at this time, see James Raven, 'Libraries for Sociability: The Advance of the Subscription Library', in Giles Mandelbrote and K.A. Manley (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland, Volume 2: 1640–1880* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 241–63; and William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 235–67.

12 When writing to their London agents in 1783, the Library Company of Philadelphia's trustees stated that "tho we would wish to mix the *Utile* with the *Dulce*, we should not think it expedient to add to our present stock, anything in the *novel* way"; Edwin Wolf II 'At the

seventeen percent of the total collection, was fiction. In its commitment to fiction the ELC seems much more in line with the Charleston Library Society, which James Raven has shown made a considerable shift between 1790 and 1810 from focusing on philosophy, law and history (as it had from its founding in 1748) to frequent acquisition of contemporary novels, a shift Raven and his sources attribute to the increased influence of female readers in the CLS.<sup>13</sup>

This equation of novels with female reading has become a truism in the history of reading, and it appears even in the ELC's own minutes, as in an 1822 president's report stating that the board, "considering the variety of tastes and dispositions, procured such [books], as might satisfy the deep research of the philosopher, and amuse the gay; nor have they left the regions of fancy unexplored, to meet the demands of the fairer part of their readers".<sup>14</sup> Whereas Endress's concern had been to acquire the "least objectionable" fiction available, his successor saw an obligation to meet "demands" from the female patrons of the library (again speaking to the importance of family usage, as most female borrowers were dependents of shareholders). Yet the director's comments also indicate that there were other ways to amuse than with fiction, and such seems to be the goal with "gay" (male, likely young) readers. History, travel and magazines were expected sources of such amusement, and these print genres were also in demand among the ELC's female clientele. As this chapter will show, assumptions about the gendered demand for reading material do not always bear up under empirical scrutiny, and the politics of this gendered analysis is predicated on a particular kind of policing of the individual reader, a practice embedded in the terminology used in the history of reading.<sup>15</sup>

Before considering the implications of the ELC's records for the history of reading, it is worthwhile to offer a brief account of what evidence survives of the library's activity. This present chapter uses a database of over 20,000 transcribed records, representing approximately one-third of an estimated 60,000 discrete loan records involving over 500 individuals (shareholders as well as representatives who signed for books on shareholders' accounts) from 1811 to

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*Instance of Benjamin Franklin: A Brief History of the Library Company of Philadelphia*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Library Company, 1995), pp. 24–25.

13 James Raven, *London Booksellers and American Customers: Transatlantic Literary Community and the Charleston Library Society, 1748–1811* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), pp. 184–203. Tom Glynn notes a similar shift in the NYSL's collecting strategy in the second half of the nineteenth century, which he also attributes to the board's desire to retain female patronage; *Reading Publics: New York City's Public Libraries, 1754–1911* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), pp. 122–23.

14 'Minute Book', p. 172.

15 While foundational studies such as Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986; rev. ed. 2004); Jane P.

1854.<sup>16</sup> Five folio ledgers, currently held by the Easton Area Public Library, preserve this core evidence. Transcriptions are complete through to 1820, and are over seventy percent complete for the following decade, meaning that there is critical mass for discussing ELC borrowing in the 1820s, though conclusions must be provisional; research into the ELC's activity is still very much in progress. One word of caution in analysing these records is how much distortion can occur when using individual loans to track patron interest in a single work. According to the ELC constitution, patrons could borrow two duodecimo volumes or one octavo volume at a time (though after about 1830 these rules proved more flexible in practice). This means that a two-volume duodecimo edition of a novel could be checked out once for a complete reading, while the ELC's eight-volume octavo edition of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* would require eight separate loans for a complete reading. Large multi-volume sets and periodicals thus potentially appear more popular than other works that may have been read an equal number of times. Looking at individual titles alongside larger trends across genres and individual case studies of shareholders helps to provide a clearer picture of what most interested the ELC's members.

### The History of Reading: Individual or Social?

The tension between the desires for enlightenment and entertainment among readers has its parallels in the scholarly study of reading and libraries. What has often been referred to as a 'reading revolution' in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries involves a complex set of dynamics. These include rapidly increasing literacy rates, the new expansion of print markets within and across nations and the development of new genres aimed at specialised readerships alongside genres developed for a large public.<sup>17</sup> Yet while scholars continue to debate whether or not a revolution in reading actually occurred, they

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Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); and Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader, 1837–1914* (New York: Oxford University Press/Clarendon Press, 1993) have contributed greatly to scholarly knowledge about women's reading practices and the uses of fiction among female audiences, men's consumption of literature now identified with women has been left largely unaccounted for.

16 The database is accessible at <http://elc.lafayette.edu/> (accessed February 2017).

17 For a summary of these dynamics and the scholarship on them, see Reinhard Wittmann, 'Was There a Reading Revolution at the End of the Eighteenth Century?', in Guiglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier (eds.), *A History of Reading in the West*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), pp. 284–312.

do tend to agree on certain things. The term 'intensive' is used to describe an 'older' practice of reading a select number of texts carefully and repeatedly, whereas 'extensive' denotes a 'modern' practice of reading many works rapidly in succession. The move from intensive to extensive is often characterised as a Fall narrative, one that interprets the expansion of information and communication as coming at the price of the cheapening of reading, turning what was once a devotional, reverent act into a crass transaction in a burgeoning capitalist world. The combination of what Michael Warner has called "uncritical reading" and actual readers' disregard for scholars' preferred aesthetic and moral values has come to mark extensive reading as a largely pejorative term in scholarship, particularly in a British context.<sup>18</sup> As Leah Price has commented, "the question of what people at some distant historical moment read rarely lies very far from the question of what people here and now should read".<sup>19</sup> The insistence on the intensive/extensive reading axis thus carries some crucial, and fraught, presuppositions about the nature of reading itself. Aimed at individual readers who can be more or less policed, these terms describe and evaluate behaviour at an individual level that is culturally elitist as well as being of limited use to the study of libraries or any other group of readers: in what context, for instance, would it make sense to describe the ELC's members as intensive readers? Where is the bar for considering them extensive? Do they populate a spectrum along the intensive/extensive axis? And if so, should this be an indication of who was (is) "accustomed to the yoke of solid study" and who was (is) not?

For scholars, as for the ELC's 1822 director, these politics serve crucial ends. If reading is to connect with bourgeois sociability, as Raven, Towsey and others have argued,<sup>20</sup> it must necessarily be shared reading; that is, not only must there be certain agreed-upon ground rules for understanding the text (for example, that Hume's *History* is a representation of real life, not fiction), but certain texts must be known in common as well. Intensive and extensive reading are fundamentally individual practices, but reading within a social library

18 While Cathy Davidson and other Americanists have often celebrated the democratising dynamic of extensive reading, this celebration often amounts to taking Satan's side in *Paradise Lost*; what is in question is the meaning of the Fall, not the fact of it. See Davidson, *Revolution and the Word*.

19 Leah Price, 'Reading: The State of the Discipline', *Book History*, 7 (2004), pp. 303–20; p. 315. See also Michael Warner, 'Uncritical Reading', in Jane Gallop (ed.), *Polemic: Critical or Uncritical* (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 13–38.

20 See James Raven, 'Libraries for Sociability'; Towsey, *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment*; Tom Glynn, *Reading Publics*; Wayne Wiegand, *Part of Our Lives: A People's History of the American Public Library* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

is, by definition, social.<sup>21</sup> The books are chosen, borrowed, returned and (at times) discussed in public space, regardless of where actual page-turning occurs, and as such, the intensive/extensive binary fails to capture the dynamics of readers in groups.

As an alternative, I propose a pair of concepts for the analysis of the ELC: shared and diffuse reading. By shared reading, I mean reading that a critical mass of readers has in common, to the point that such reading may be used as a cultural reference; this would incorporate traditional notions of canon (e.g., Shakespeare) as well as the bestsellers of the time (e.g., contemporary novelists). An individual may read widely within the circle of shared reading or not; she or he may return to a few favourites repeatedly, or chain-read through volume after volume, or a combination of the two. But to the extent that a reader's choices overlap with those of the next reader, she or he is participating in shared reading. Diffuse reading, then, is the other reading that one does – again, it may be intensive or extensive in nature, but its essential quality is that it expands the total amount of reading the reader does and it does not necessarily have anything directly to do with what the reader's neighbour is reading. Everything from genre fiction to forgotten classics to devotional works to newspapers might fall into this category. I propose these two terms because I think that together they better describe how groups of readers behave than previous terms have done, and that they offer a way to analyse reading patterns without immediate recourse to the defence of a canon on prescriptive grounds. By giving attention to where the interests of ELC members converged and where their borrowing patterns spread out from specific authors or titles to larger trends of genre or format, we can gain a more accurate picture of the place reading had in this Pennsylvania market town.

### Parsing Popularity in the ELC

In moving to the loans themselves, a useful starting point is a simple tallying of the most popular titles across the span of the records transcribed thus far (Table 12.1). At a glance, Table 12.1 reflects to a degree the reading behaviour

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21 While not a focus of this chapter, a growing body of scholarship has brought to light the centrality of sociability in the development of social libraries. See Raven, 'Libraries for Sociability'; Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); Elizabeth Long, *Book Clubs: Women and the Uses of Reading in Everyday Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

TABLE 12.1 *Twenty most-borrowed titles, 1810–34.*<sup>a</sup>

Title	Genre	Loans
<i>Port-folio</i>	Magazine	892
<i>American Museum</i>	Magazine	391
<i>Analectic Magazine</i>	Magazine	328
<i>Select Reviews of Literature</i>	Magazine	286
Rollin, <i>Ancient History</i>	History	269
J. Porter, <i>Scottish Chiefs</i>	Fiction	265
Smollett, <i>Miscellaneous Works</i>	Belles-Lettres	265
Hume/Smollett, <i>History of England</i>	History	257
Shakespeare, <i>Plays</i>	Belles-Lettres	236
<i>Museum of Foreign Literature &amp; Science</i>	Magazine	226
<i>New Monthly Magazine</i>	Magazine	217
Goldsmith, <i>Miscellaneous Works</i>	Belles-Lettres	181
Bruce, <i>Travels Through Africa</i>	Travels	153
<i>Niles's Weekly Register</i>	Magazine	149
A.M. Porter, <i>Hungarian Brothers</i>	Fiction	148
Addison & Steele, <i>Spectator</i>	Belles-Lettres	143
Irving, <i>Sketch Book</i>	Misc./Fiction	142
Cervantes, <i>Don Quixote</i>	Fiction	134
Silliman, <i>Travels in England, etc.</i>	Travels	129
Roche, <i>Children of the Abbey</i>	Fiction	127

<sup>a</sup> The genre names are based on the subject headings of *The Catalogue of the Books Belonging to the Easton Library Company* (Easton, PA, 1855). The ELC uses the spelling 'Belles Letters', but I have opted for the more typical modern spelling here.

Isabelle Lehuu documents at the CLS during this period:<sup>22</sup> periodicals dominate the top of the list, followed by works of history and belles-lettres. The first four titles are magazines, as are the tenth, eleventh and fourteenth. Yet some important points of contrast emerge here as well. First of all, the number of periodicals is smaller and not as dominant as at Charleston, where all of the top nine titles were magazines; this may reflect the ELC's modest budget for subscriptions at least as much as readers' preferences. Yet another observation is worth making here: while six of the nine (four of the top five) titles at the CLS

22 Isabelle Lehuu, 'Reconstructing Reading Vogues in the Old South: Borrowings from the Charleston Library Society, 1811–1817', in Shafquat Towheed and W.R. Owens (eds.), *The*



were British in origin, all of the ELC's top magazines are American, despite subscriptions to London-based titles like the *British Mercury* and the *Athenaeum*. This reflects differences in source – Charleston continued to rely on importing from London, Easton turned to Philadelphia booksellers for material – but also a greater concern in Charleston to stay as current as possible on transatlantic news, something much less important in Easton, which drew from an American metropole for its commerce.

Beyond the periodicals, the top titles include history, plays, and fiction, all European in origin. Charles Rollin's eight-volume *Ancient History*, David Hume's eleven-volume *History of England* (augmented by Tobias Smollett's four-volume continuation) and Shakespeare's *Plays* in seventeen volumes are little surprise as top titles; they rank highly on the CLS's list as well. Smollett's six-volume *Miscellaneous Works*, nearly all of which was fiction, follows closely, likely because Smollett had also written the continuation volumes for Hume's *History*. This suggests that the reading of history was seen as a distinctly literary enterprise by ELC patrons, such that readers of historical narratives were more likely to turn to novels than to philosophy after reading history, a connection that will now be traced in more detail with the remaining top work, Jane Porter's *Scottish Chiefs*.

A triple-decker novel from 1810 narrating the exploits of William Wallace, *Scottish Chiefs* is the only single novel, the only duodecimo, the only work by a woman, and the only work with fewer than eight volumes in the top ten. Its 176 loans before 1820 placed the novel seventh among all titles in the 1810s, a further eighty-six loans before 1830 being good enough for tenth place in the 1820s. The next most-popular novel, *The Hungarian Brothers*, was by Jane Porter's sister, Anna Maria Porter, and together the Porters accounted for four of the nine top novels of the 1810s; they each had at least one later novel outperform *Ivanhoe*, Sir Walter Scott's most popular 1820s novel. The Porters were indeed among the most popular novelists on both sides of the Atlantic in the 1810s; three of the top ten novels at the CLS in this period were Porter titles.<sup>23</sup> But what made them so popular in Easton? How might we place them within larger patterns of reading, and what does their prominence in Easton and Charleston tell us about how we might revise our literary history of the English-speaking Atlantic?

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*History of Reading, Volume 1: International Perspectives, c. 1500–1990* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 64–83.

23 Anna Maria Porter's *The Lake of Killarney*, was the top novel in the CLS, but it was never in the ELC's collection; see Lehuu, 'Reconstructing Reading Vogues', p. 75.

The first part of the answer is a negative one: whatever the ELC president's claims, female demand did not drive the Porters' ELC success. In 1812, the year *Scottish Chiefs* entered the collection, the ELC's top four novelists (Maria Edgeworth, Maria Roche, and the Porters) saw a combined 112 loans for eleven titles. It is very difficult to say whether these were read more by women or by men, since much of this material would have been consumed by multiple members of a family, and a shareholder could easily bring the book home for a spouse, sibling, or child. That said, one thing that stands out in the data is that women began signing for loans much more frequently in 1813, and a large spike in fiction loans coincides with this. While in 1812 only twenty-one of the 112 loans (nearly eighteen percent) had female names signed to them, in 1813 eighty-eight of 178 loan records (over forty-nine percent) were signed by or for female patrons. The number of male names or indeterminate signatures, such as "per order" or "family", stayed stable, at ninety-one in 1812 and ninety in 1813. Yet examining fiction loans for the decade broken down by gender yields some surprises, as Figures 12.1 and 12.2 show.

The highest lines on each chart indicate the combined loans for all the top authors in that year; the very low start in 1812 followed by a huge increase in loans among female borrowers is quite apparent, while male borrowers began an accelerating decline in their loans after 1812. The engine that drove the sudden resurgence in male borrowing in 1817 was Scott, whose fiction first entered

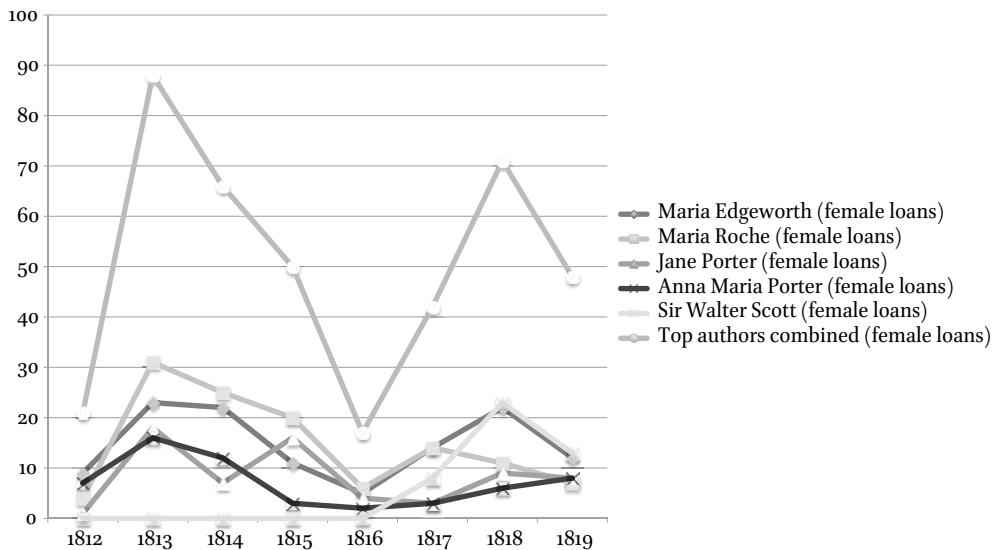


FIGURE 12.1 *Top 5 novelists of 1810s by year, female borrowers.*

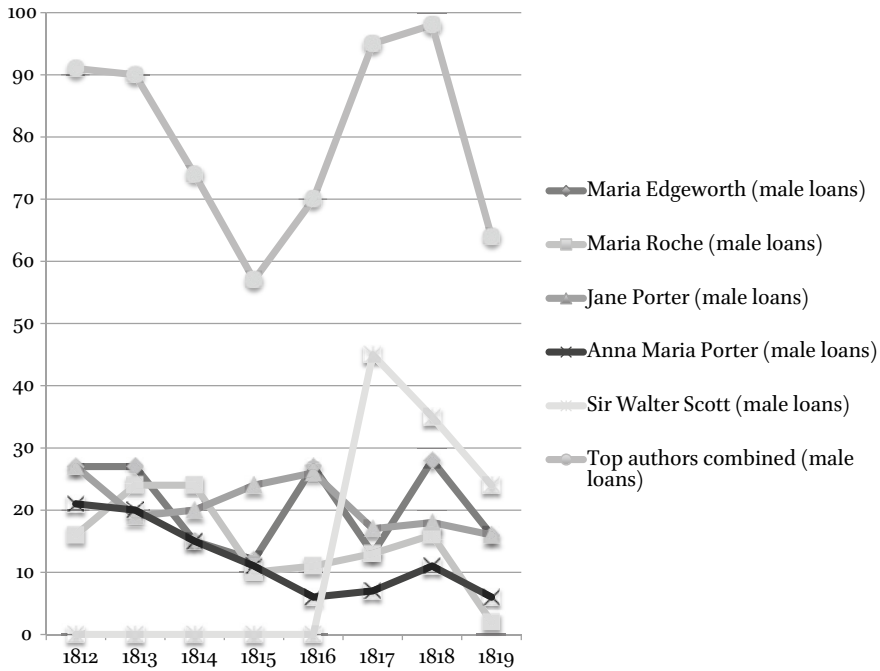


FIGURE 12.2 *Top 5 novelists of 1810s by year, male borrowers.*

the collection that year with five titles including *Waverley* (1814). He became popular among female borrowers as well, but later and never as dramatically as among male borrowers. Throughout the decade, Roche and Edgeworth were the women's top choices, with Scott eventually tying Edgeworth. Roche was the first widely popular novelist to have more female borrowers in a year than male ones; she was also arguably the raciest, certainly the most Gothic, of the ELC's list of novelists. The more restrained Edgeworth enjoyed commensurate popularity with men and women, but the Porters could best be described as men's novelists in the ELC. The kind of reading experience Easton readers associated with the Porters was much closer to that of Hume, Rollin and William Robertson (three authors with significant overlap in borrowers with *Scottish Chiefs*) than it was to Edgeworth's social commentary or Roche's Gothic sensibility.

But why *The Scottish Chiefs* in particular? No other novel comes close to its performance in the 1810s, and only a few (and none by Scott) can match its popularity in the 1820s. A brief look at a few borrowers' records offers some clues as to how this happened, given the relative lack of female interest. Abraham Horn, a founding board member of the ELC, was one of the first dozen

borrowers of *The Scottish Chiefs*, and he had already shown himself to be an avid ELC patron. Beginning with simultaneous runs through Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* and Russell's *History of Ancient Europe* (he liked to read works in parallel), he worked his way through Smollett's novels, Bruce's *Travels*, and Ferguson's *Roman Republic* before dipping into Hume's *History of England* and reading through Rollin's *Ancient History*. Upon finishing Rollin in July 1812, he read *Scottish Chiefs* alongside the *Works* of Oliver Goldsmith, continuing from there to the *Spectator*, Plutarch's *Lives*, and Johann Mosheim's *Ecclesiastical History*. This nonfiction-heavy pattern typified the borrowing habits of male shareholders in the ELC's early years; Christian Endress used his son Samuel's account to check out *Scottish Chiefs* that same month, as his own account was tied up with finishing Mosheim and beginning *Anacharsis's Travels*. While some such as Dr John Cooper also enjoyed novels such as *Don Quixote*, *Joseph Andrews*, and *Clarissa* in the early years, the default was works of history, often ancient history, mixed with travel writing and biography. *Scottish Chiefs* would thus settle into this type of pattern as a lighter moment in a course of historical reading. Cooper, in fact, abandoned Rollin halfway through in favour of *Scottish Chiefs* very soon after Horn borrowed the book. Cooper's adolescent son John, Jr would read the novel alongside Tacitus in 1817, by which time the doctor's daughter Charlotte had also borrowed it multiple times. All three Coopers rotated freely between history, biography, travel and fiction, and they could agree with the more cerebrally focused Horn on *Scottish Chiefs*; as a historical novel without the Gothic elements of Roche, Porter's book found an audience among readers, largely male, who would not likely self-identify as novel-readers. The growth in novel-reading was not driven by titles such as *Scottish Chiefs*, but by the diffuse reading of many borrowers, women alongside men. In this way, the status of *Scottish Chiefs* as shared reading made it atypical among the ELC's novels, a genre that in this community favoured diffuse reading of many titles rather than concentration on a select few. A closer look at the statistics of entire genres will make this clearer and move us further to a sense of what constituted a work's popularity in the ELC.

### Diffuse Reading in Action: The Tide of Fiction Raises Reading's Boat

While looking at individual titles helps us to see where readers share their reading, and individual records help us to detect patterns of which titles might be shared (or diffuse) in sequence, a more abstract view helps us to capture

more fully the nature and force of diffuse reading, which has been largely invisible in the history of reading thus far. The loans represented in Figures 12.1 and 12.2 – the most-shared novels – account for only about forty percent of the total fiction loans before 1820, and most of the sixty novels acquired before 1820 were borrowed fewer than thirty times, suggesting that diffuse reading plays a greater role in the overall popularity of a genre. Figure 12.3 below offers comparisons of the six most popular genre/subject categories, as defined in the 1855 ELC catalogue, breaking down loan totals for the 1810s and the 1820s.

The most obvious finding in Figure 12.3 is that fiction began as the most popular genre and only increased its dominance as time went on. The proportion of fiction in the collection remained fairly constant, as did the number of available shares for members; demand for fiction simply kept increasing over time. Travel, biography and magazines all saw increases in the 1820s, while belles-lettres and history both declined. Outside of fiction, none of these changes in relative popularity was especially remarkable, but it is worth noting that most of the large multi-volume sets that dominate the list in Table 12.1 are in the genres whose popularity declined after 1820, suggesting that changes in a genre's popularity might also involve changes in a format's popularity: reading a work that could be digested over a week or two – such as a two-volume novel or a magazine volume – became more common than the practice of dipping

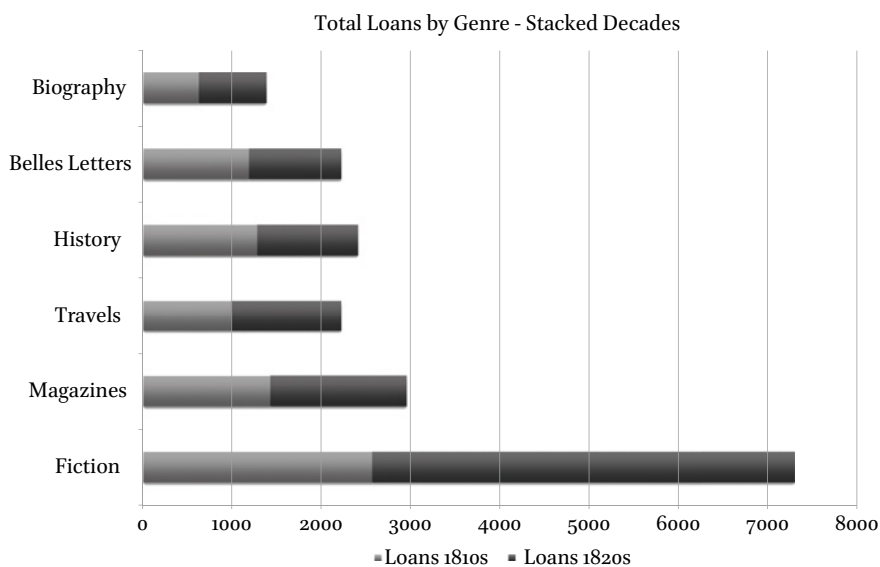


FIGURE 12.3 *Total loans by genre for most popular genres, by decade.*

into a larger work, particularly if that work lacked a clear narrative core that would carry readers from volume to volume (collected works of Shakespeare, Goldsmith and others are prime examples of a narrative-less title). At the same time, Figure 12.3 also shows that as dominant as magazine titles were in Table 12.1, they still were not as numerically significant for ELC readers as what B.G. MacCarthy has called the “ceaseless tide of fiction”.<sup>24</sup> While few individual titles were blockbusters, enough titles were borrowed consistently enough to make the reading of fiction almost a default among ELC members. Male interest in the Porters’ novels and female interest in fiction more generally contributed together to this growth across the 1810s and into the next decade.

The continuing increase in demand for fiction meant that by the time a new wave of fiction was purchased in 1821, ELC patrons were ready to respond in great numbers to the arrival of a popular title. While titles such as *Scottish Chiefs* clearly remained popular, Table 12.2 shows that in the 1820s the decline of multi-volume works’ dominance coincided with the rise of American best-sellers, particularly Washington Irving’s *Sketch Book* and James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Spy*.

TABLE 12.2 *Ten most-borrowed titles for 1820s.*

Title	Genre	Loans
<i>Port-folio</i>	Magazine	386
<i>New Monthly Magazine</i>	Magazine	215
<i>American Museum</i>	Magazine	180
<i>Museum of Foreign Literature &amp; Science</i>	Magazine	155
Irving, <i>The Sketch Book</i>	Miscellaneous/Fiction	136
<i>Athenaeum</i> (London)	Magazine	118
Cooper, <i>The Spy</i>	Fiction	109
Rollin, <i>Ancient History</i>	History	94
Ramsay, <i>Universal History</i>	History	91
<i>Americanised</i>		
J. Porter, <i>Scottish Chiefs</i>	Fiction	84

24 B.G. MacCarthy, *The Female Pen: Women Writers and Novelists 1621–1818* (1946–47; repr. New York: New York University Press, 1994), p. 284.

Keeping in mind that at least twenty percent of the loan data for the decade has yet to be transcribed, Cooper's 109 loans and Irving's 136 are enough to stay ahead of Porter's and Scott's totals and earn the top spots among single-authored titles for the 1820s (though Rollin's appearance indicates that the decade saw something short of a full-blown revolution). Beyond the country of origin, what is distinctive about Irving's and Cooper's titles compared to the previous decade's most popular books is that they both benefited from a massive early wave of interest. *The Spy* is the first book in the ELC's collection to follow what we now think of as a new-release phenomenon: acquired at the earliest possible opportunity in January 1822, the book immediately began leaving the shelf in rapid succession, with forty-two loans of one or both volumes by the end of the calendar year, about forty percent of the title's decade total. (Scott's most popular novel of the decade, *Ivanhoe*, was borrowed only twelve times in its first year, less than a quarter of its decade total). Cooper's work benefited from earlier excitement over Irving's *Sketch Book*, and the history of that work's reception in the ELC provides one last example of the dynamics of shared and diffuse reading.

The *Sketch Book*, which included 'Rip Van Winkle' and 'The Legend of Sleepy Hollow' but focused on topics such as old British Christmas traditions and the search for Shakespeare's England, first appears in the ELC ledgers in April 1821, and in that year the work was borrowed eighty-five times. This extraordinary number reflects the fact that the ELC acquired the seven serialised parts in April 1821 before eventually binding them into a two-volume set that September. Demand for the seven parts was without precedent; multiple times, as many as five different patrons borrowed a part on the same day. Two or three loans a week was typical. Yet this was not really a stampede for the new. The first instalment had appeared in spring of 1819, and the complete book was already available a year later. And the ELC acquired all seven parts at the same time, so demand was not built by the suspense of waiting for the next instalment, as has often been considered a key to marketing serialised works. Rather, Irving was a known quantity among ELC members; the board, who usually insisted on deep discounts from booksellers for cash payment, was willing to pay the full price of five dollars and thirty-seven-and-a-half cents for an outdated format because they expected a warm reception for Irving's work. Irving's track record was clear. The comic *History of New-York* had received a respectable sixty-five loans before 1820, and more importantly, Irving edited the *Analectic Magazine* for much of the 1810s (when that magazine was the ELC's second-most-popular title overall). Thus Irving rode not only the tide of fiction but that of magazines and travel-writing, all of which are incorporated in the *Sketch Book*. In fact, ELC patrons' consumption of *The Sketch Book* seems to follow

the patterns of scattershot magazine reading more than the sequential reading of a novel. Of the eighty-five loans in 1821, seventy-one were of serialised parts before the bound volumes were available in September; among the seventy-one loans, twenty-five unique borrowers signed for the books, and of those, only seven borrowed at least four of the seven parts, with only two (including Abraham Horn) borrowing all of them. None read in strict sequence, likely owing to the high demand for the parts, but not everyone even tried to start at the beginning. ELC patrons were more interested in sampling Irving's meandering work than devouring it, and Irving's standing in the magazine scene at the time likely dictated both his popularity and the approach people took to consuming his work at the ELC.

One other element of Irving's and Cooper's popularity deserves mention: the maleness of those authors' audiences. The divide between male and female demand for Porter's *Scottish Chiefs* has been discussed above, but its legacy was more powerful than might be expected. There in fact proves to be an inverse relationship between a work's overall popularity and the equality of its gender ratio among borrowers. *Scottish Chiefs* had 126 male borrowers in 1810s and fifty female borrowers, well over a two-to-one ratio of men to women. In the 1820s, the split was sixty-eight/eighteen – nearly four-to-one. This trend with *Scottish Chiefs* proved powerful for Porter's other works; while most new novels by both Porters were borrowed on much lower ratios, Jane Porter's *Bannockburn*, a less-successful sequel to *Scottish Chiefs*, received only three female borrowers to twenty-seven male for a staggering nine-to-one ratio. This pattern continued with other top titles. While female demand for Scott was steady, his most popular novel of the 1820s, *Ivanhoe*, saw a ratio of over three-to-one in borrowers; similar results held for Cooper's *Spy* and Irving's *Sketch Book*. The tide of fiction was certainly rising at this time, and women readers had a major role to play in that phenomenon, but in the case of the ELC, it would seem that shared reading by men, not diffuse reading by women, was the key contributing factor to the success of the individual authors Scott, Irving, Cooper, and before them, Jane Porter.

### Conclusion

As has generally been the case, MacCarthy tends to employ the phrase "tide of fiction" negatively, setting the period's legion of forgotten novelists in contradistinction to 'The Big Four' of Fielding, Richardson, Sterne and Smollett. The importance of that tide for the publishing industry has been documented by scholars such William St Clair, and Wayne Wiegand argues in *Part of Our*



*Lives: A People's History of the American Public Library* that one of the most signal services a library provides is making popular reading available to its clientele.<sup>25</sup> The ELC had an investment in providing the "most valuable" shared reading for its members, both in cosmopolitan histories and in popular sensations. Nevertheless, the continual supply of a wide range of reading, much of which would never be widely famous as Cooper or Scott were, made the ELC more inviting to female borrowers than it would have been otherwise. Whether or not they were conscious of it, the ELC's board found ways to foster diffuse reading, and it is this kind of reading that in turn generated the large numbers that gave fiction its reputation for popularity – though it also benefited history, biography, and other genres. If the vision of shared reading that the ELC's founders expressed proved too elitist and masculine an Atlantic, the fact that the library was able to survive until 1862, far beyond the typical life span of such an institution, indicates that diffuse reading was in Easton, as it likely was in most libraries, the lifeblood of the community of readers.

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25 St Clair, *The Reading Nation*; Wiegand, *Part of Our Lives*, pp. 3–5.

## Crafting Respectability: The Politics of Class at the Mechanic Apprentices' Library of Boston

Lynda K. Yankaskas\*

4 July 1833. It had been a cooler than usual spring, but the weather in eastern Massachusetts was “delightful” that morning.<sup>1</sup> In Boston, the Mechanic Apprentices' Library Association set off in the annual Independence Day parade from the State House at the edge of Boston Common at eight A.M. On this day, the parade comprised nearly four hundred young men, accompanied by local clergy and a military escort. The *Boston Evening Transcript* afterwards described the parade as “highly imposing ... from the moral and intellectual aspect of the scene”.<sup>2</sup>

The parade route, covering approximately one and one-half miles, proceeded north from the State House through the West End before turning east and then south through the central business district. Along the way, the marchers passed the Old State House, King's Chapel and its burying ground, the jail and court house, and a variety of commercial and residential establishments. Their final destination was a church on Chauncey Place, two blocks east of the Common, where the celebration concluded with an address by Amasa Walker, a local abolitionist and peace advocate who later served as Massachusetts Secretary of State. The route, moving as it did from a government building to a church, symbolically linked the temporal domain of state and local government with the spiritual domain of religion, sanctifying the political victory of independence by confirming its religious significance. Winding through the town centre on the most important of civic holidays, the procession seemingly placed the marchers at the centre of Boston's civic life.<sup>3</sup>

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\* The author thanks Jane Kamensky, the Early Americanists of the Lehigh Valley, the volume editors, and members of the Community Libraries Network for valuable comments on earlier versions of this chapter.

1 *Salem Gazette*, 5 July 1833, 9 July 1833, 9 August 1833.

2 *Boston Evening Transcript*, 3 July 1833, p. 2 and 5 July 1833, p. 2.

3 That parade routes were symbolic was long-established in Boston; the memorial procession for George Washington had taken a similar route, moving from the New State House to the Old South Meeting House. *Columbian Centinel*, 8 January 1800, and *The Constitutional Telegraph*, 8 January 1800.

The eleven groups that made up the procession included, in addition to the Apprentices' Library, two debating societies, two lyceums, two temperance societies, a Bible society, a fraternal club, a literary society and the Mercantile Library Association. While lyceums and debating societies were necessarily communal, we might wonder at the presence of the library associations, groups formed around the ostensibly private act of reading. Yet the Apprentices' Library was perhaps the first among equals, because the young men's convocation at the church, to which young ladies were also invited, served additionally as a fund-raiser for the Bunker Hill Monument, which was already a library project. While all the young men's societies contributed, the Apprentices' Library bore a special responsibility to the monument through its connection with the Massachusetts Charitable Mechanics Association, sponsor of both the monument and the library. Thus the participation of the Apprentices' Library in the Independence Day exercises was no anomaly; indeed, its absence would have been more notable.

Apprentices' libraries are an understudied component of early American culture. Long dismissed as ineffectual or unimportant, they have only recently begun to get their due from scholars.<sup>4</sup> Yet a closer look at the activities of the Mechanic Apprentices' Library Association in the 1830s shows that the library was an important site of contestation and meaning-making both for its members and the master artisans who had sponsored it, and for the Boston elites who witnessed its progress. By parading on the Fourth, Boston's young men – Library Association members prominent among them – earned the commendation of their elders, as the *Transcript's* writer shows. But they also staked their own claims, on their own terms, to the city and to its history. Reading participation in the July Fourth celebration alongside the full range of Apprentices' Library Association activities shows that in this institution built of books, young men constructed and defended boundaries of identity even as their employers and local elites sought to shape their conduct and transform the Library Association into a symbol for their own ends.

This chapter explores the ways that elites and master artisans envisioned the Mechanic Apprentices' Library Association of Boston at its creation, and the ways that apprentices reshaped the institution when it came into their control. Historians of print culture have long seen the early republic as characterised by the democratisation of print, meaning that reading was a vehicle for

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4 W.J. Rorabaugh, for instance, argues that the influence of apprentice libraries was negligible, at best. However, I believe that he underestimates their importance both qualitatively and quantitatively; *The Craft Apprentice: From Franklin to the Machine Age in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 121–124, 163–167.

social advancement, and increased access to newspapers and books was correlated with rising social democracy. They have therefore tended to see libraries as a basically democratising force.<sup>5</sup> Those few who have looked at apprentices' libraries have described them as training grounds for movement out of the artisan class. W.J. Rorabaugh, for instance, has characterised apprentices' library activities as "an attempt ... to rehearse for larger roles they intended to undertake in later years". Tom Glynn, more recently, argues that the "fundamental aim in establishing the Apprentices' Library" in New York City was to turn, in Mordechai Noah's words, a "ragged apprentice" into "an accomplished gentleman".<sup>6</sup> I agree that library sponsors sought in part to tame what they feared might be an unruly class of young artisans. However, apprentices themselves understood their library to be much more than a way to transcend their class status. Moreover, while modern scholars have echoed Noah's emphasis on the individual reader, I join with other scholars in this volume to emphasise the communal nature of library activity. I argue that while apprentices and their sponsors shared, at least in part, the goal of inculcating self-improvement according to developing middle-class norms, apprentices also used the library as a place to distil a distinct and shared class identity, rather than to transcend their status through individual transformation.

To understand the place of the Apprentices' Library in the Boston of the 1830s, it is worth sketching the circumstances of its creation. The Mechanic Apprentices' Library Association was just one among many similar projects in the early decades of the nineteenth century when cities all along the Atlantic seaboard opened apprentices' libraries. Those in Boston, Albany, New York City, and Philadelphia were the earliest, all opening in 1820. These were followed the next year by one in Trenton, NJ. By the end of the decade, eight more East Coast apprentices' libraries had opened, in Portsmouth, NH; Charleston, Springfield, and Haverhill, MA; Brooklyn, NY; Burlington, NJ; Baltimore, MD; and Charleston, SC. Away from the coast, Pittsburgh, PA, and Cincinnati and Columbus, OH, also opened apprentices' libraries in the 1820s. On the far side of the Atlantic, Liverpool, then Britain's most important port, organised

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5 See, for example, Richard D. Brown, *Knowledge is Power: The Diffusion of Information in Early America, 1700–1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). This understanding of democratisation stands in contrast, for example, to Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), which sees democratisation as the movement of middle-class Americans toward working-class norms.

6 Rorabaugh, *The Craft Apprentice*, p. 123. Tom Glynn, *Reading Publics: New York City's Public Libraries, 1754–1911* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), p. 65. Glynn quotes from Noah's address at the 1850 dedication ceremony for New York's Apprentice Library.

a library for apprentices in 1823; in Nottingham, the library opened for artisans the following year admitted apprentices.<sup>7</sup> Like the elite libraries joined by apprentices' library sponsors, then, libraries for aspiring artisans were part of a transatlantic movement to build class-specific voluntary institutions around books. Apprentices themselves were aware of their participation in this wider community, as exemplified by the New York Apprentices' Library's gift of a banner to its Liverpool counterpart upon the occasion of the latter's official opening in 1824.<sup>8</sup>

The American apprentices' libraries were alike in that all served young men in their mid-teens to early twenties (the usual age to end an apprenticeship being twenty-one), and in that they were created in response to a common set of concerns and goals. Changes in work patterns, home life, religion and consumer culture in this period had transformed family relationships and the respective roles of young people and adults in general. In particular, these changes had transformed the system of apprenticeship by which young men had traditionally learned the skills to advance to financial independence. By the 1830s, the American apprenticeship system had travelled far from its colonial and European roots. As Rorabaugh has described, a combination of mechanisation, the resulting influx of unskilled labour to craft work and an end to the patriarchal system of treating apprentices as surrogate children who lived and dined with their masters had fundamentally transformed the old system. These changes were matched by a similar evolution in the British system; by 1841, a Liverpool ship's carpenter, for example, complained that only a quarter of apprentices in his trade were serving out their time. Though apprenticeship in some form would last until the Civil War, apprentices of the 1830s lived and worked under a system closer to wage labour than to the traditional indenture system.<sup>9</sup>

As well as providing for the training and eventual employment of young men, the traditional apprenticeship system had gone far to control their

7 See the Davies Project at Princeton University, which maintains a searchable database of American libraries to 1876. Online at <https://daviesproject.princeton.edu/databases/index.html>. For more on the apprentices' library of New York, see Glynn, *Reading Publics*, or Tom Glynn, 'Books for a Reformed Republic: The Apprentices' Library of New York City, 1820–1865', *Libraries & Culture*, 34.4 (Fall 1999), pp. 347–72. On British examples, see David Allan, *A Nation of Readers: The Lending Library in Georgian England* (London: The British Library, 2008), p. 73, and Mabel Tylecote, *The Mechanics' Institutes of Lancashire and Yorkshire before 1851* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1957).

8 Tylecote, *Mechanics' Institutes*, pp. 55–56.

9 Rorabaugh, *The Craft Apprentice*; Frank Neal, *Sectarian Violence: The Liverpool Experience, 1819–1914: An Aspect of Anglo-Irish History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p. 54.

behaviour and activities. Living with their masters, apprentices remained under the watchful eye of adults, who generally imposed strict norms of conduct both during and after working hours. Among the changes in American life brought about by the breakdown of traditional apprenticeships was an influx of single young men to cities and a growing population of such youths living without the restraining hand of the traditional indenture relationship. As Rorabaugh, Paul Johnson and others have explained, as craft apprenticeship began to resemble wage labour, apprentices moved out of their masters' homes to boarding houses or other arrangements, and claimed more of their after-hours time for their own pursuits.<sup>10</sup>

This change in turn provoked anxiety among middle- and upper-class citizens, who worried that unsupervised single young men might cause disruption and engage in debauchery of various kinds.<sup>11</sup> In reaction, groups of middle-class and elite citizens joined together to create a variety of institutions to occupy the time and energy of young people, in an effort to provide wholesome and respectable alternatives to the tavern, the travelling spectacle and the street. Prominent among these new institutions was the apprentices' library. Although similar concerns motivated the establishment of such libraries on both sides of the Atlantic, the specific and diverging political contexts endowed these institutions with particular meaning in each place. In America, the 1820s saw the semi-centennial of Independence, a milestone marked by increasingly heated debates over the meaning of the American Revolution and its legacies for working people in particular. Those debates gave such class-inflected projects as apprentices' libraries specific resonances in the United States, as various groups sought to define the Revolution and to enlist apprentices in carrying out particular versions of its supposed legacy. Connections between Revolutionary memory and founders' hopes for the libraries were evident not just in the procession with which this chapter opens but from the earliest conceptions of apprentices' libraries like Boston's.

In Boston, the Mechanic Apprentices' Library Association was established in 1820 as a subsidiary of the Massachusetts Charitable Mechanics Association

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10 Paul Johnson described the changes in residential patterns in *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815–1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), especially Chapter 2.

11 Middle-class fears are best described in Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830–1870* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982). For middle-class efforts to confront specific social problems in the early republic, see Bruce Dorsey, *Reforming Men & Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002).

(MCMA), which was itself founded in 1795 with eighty-three charter members and incorporated in 1806 under the motto “Be Just and Fear Not”.<sup>12</sup> According to a modern chronicler, it was retired merchant William Wood, also the patron of libraries in New York, New Orleans and Montreal, who provided the idea for the library and the core of its initial collection. Wood presented the MCMA with a collection of nearly 1,500 donated books as the seed of a library, and specified that the books “should be forever opened for the use of the mechanics and all needy apprentices, ‘GRATIS’”, and that the room should be opened twice a week “for the information and use of all apprentices who are mechanics, of twenty years of age, and if convenient to those of nineteen years of age”.<sup>13</sup>

The limitation of library usage to the oldest apprentices suggests that the master craftsmen of the MCMA were more interested in initiating these young men into their own group than in serving a younger, more dependent population. Apprentices of nineteen and twenty were, at least in theory, on the verge of becoming masters themselves; interesting them in the MCMA could, on the one hand, help to increase the size and influence of the Association as those apprentices became journeymen and then masters. The MCMA, even after a post-1800 expansion, represented a minority of the city’s master mechanics, so it is reasonable to conjecture that its members would have had an interest in exerting some effort to recruit new members.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, creation of the library may have been seen as a means of exerting influence over young men before they slipped the bonds of apprenticeship, a last chance to shape their characters and politics before they became independent men.

If master artisans were motivated by concern for the MCMA, it was the task of shaping citizens that brought the attention of the Boston elites who lent their support to the venture. In speeches, appeals for aid and annual reports summarising the key accomplishments and aspirations of the institution, library supporters repeatedly emphasised young men’s role in shaping the nation. Orations given on a library’s opening day are among the most telling exemplars of sponsors’ intentions. When the Library Association opened its doors on 22 February 1820, the festivities included an address by Theodore

12 For an overview of the history of the MCMA, see Raymond J. Purdy, *The Quiet Philanthropy, 1795–1995* (Boston: Massachusetts Charitable Mechanic Association, 1995). Useful material on the MCMA also appears in Lisa Beth Lubow, ‘Artisans in Transition: Early Capitalist Development and the Carpenters of Boston, 1787–1837’, unpublished PhD thesis, UCLA, 1987.

13 Summarised from Purdy, *The Quiet Philanthropy*, p. 97, which cites the letter from Wood to Benjamin Russell, Esq., and the government of the MCMA, 22 February 1820. On Wood, see Glynn, *Reading Publics*, p. 49.

14 Alfred A. Young, *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party: Memory and the American Revolution* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), p. 129.

Lyman, Jr, a member of a prominent family who later served as a state legislator and Boston's mayor. Evidently a noted speaker, he would be chosen two months later to give the annual 4 July oration for the town.<sup>15</sup>

In his address to the assembled crowd, Lyman emphasised two themes. He stressed the opportunities offered by the library and invoked the spirit of the Revolution as inspiration for the performance of duty. He asked his hearers, "What will it profit us to live under a pleasant sky ... or be clothed in shining apparel, if we shall be found wanting in minds well instructed and in hearts dignified and well strengthened?" He specified two areas in which readers should take care to be well instructed: American history and craft labour. "Above all", he counselled, "read the books which relate the history of your own country: read what Washington, Franklin, Adams, Hancock have done .... Thus my friends you will know how sacred is this place where you were born; and thus you will learn to love and defend it".<sup>16</sup> Lyman thereby set up the library as a means of inculcating both a broad patriotism and also, by his specific reference to pre-Revolutionary incidents in Boston, a narrower allegiance to his home city.

These lessons of national and local pride were reinforced by the physical location of the library in the Old Town House of Boston, a symbolically weighted space. While apprentices might have associated the building most with the physical labour of a preceding generation of artisans, the Old Town House had been the setting for James Otis's February 1761 oration against the writs of assistance, a speech which John Adams later called "the first scene of the first Act of opposition to the Arbitrary claims of Great Britain".<sup>17</sup> As the scene of revolutionary (or pre-revolutionary) drama, the room carried the weight of national aspirations and the residue of greatness. Like Lyman's reference to specific pre-Revolutionary events in Boston, the Old Town House may also have reinforced a form of what historian Robb Haberman has called "provincial nationalism". Haberman finds that magazines "invoked nationalist rhetoric to publicise and

15 *Independent Chronicle and Boston Patriot*, 29 April 1820, p. 2; *New England Palladium*, 2 May 1820, p. 2; and the *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 11 July 1820, p. 2. See also the Lyman Family Papers 1795–1956, Massachusetts Historical Society [hereafter, MHS], Boston, MA.

16 MHS, Massachusetts Charitable Mechanic Association records [hereafter, MCMA records], *Address by Theodore Lyman Jr. at the Founding of the Apprentice Library Association in Boston, February 22nd 1820*, pp. 2, 6–8.

17 Adams, John. Letter to William Tudor, Sr. 29 March 1817. Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-6735>, accessed February 2017). Also reprinted in the *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 27 March 1818. Annika Bautz parallels my argument here in its insistence that the physical space of a library held symbolic meaning, and that proprietors were deliberate about both spaces and their meanings (see Chapter 11).



amplify” the virtues of specific localities.<sup>18</sup> While neither Lyman’s speech nor the library’s address had the geographic reach of Haberman’s periodicals, each balanced the language of national identity with the specific claims of Boston proper, implicitly urging apprentices to embrace both a particular vision of national identity and – in a time of growing sectional tension – a more local patriotism.

It was no accident that the opening celebration for the library was set for Washington’s birthday. Lyman himself marked the convergence by asking, “is there any other day when our hearts will be more united, our feelings more exalted, or our good deeds better rewarded by the smiles and inclination of Heaven and the gratitude of that generation to which our efforts have been consecrated?”<sup>19</sup> As Alfred Young has explained, the 1830s saw the reclamation of the legacy of the Revolution by a wide range of citizens. Just as the last veterans of the war were dying, political rivalries of the early 1830s “laid bare rival claims to Boston’s revolutionary heritage”. Boston shipwrights would go on strike in 1832; just north of Boston, four hundred Lowell “mill girls” staged their own strike in February 1834. Later that year, Boston’s stonecutters, masons and housewrights would participate in a general walkout. All of these groups invoked the legacy of the Revolution, as did anti-Catholic mobs and anti-slavery activists, each engaged in violent street battles of their own.<sup>20</sup> None of this agitation was unique to Boston; 1835 was the peak of the ten-hour work day movement nationwide.<sup>21</sup> However, the appeals to the Revolution’s legacy had particular resonance in the city that saw the first skirmishes. They also had particular political meanings; as Young explains, invocations of the Revolution could stress either a more conservative or a more radical interpretation of the period. Lyman’s words, anticipating by a decade the labour battles to come, were part of the conservative strain. He invoked formally-selected leaders, not the mob; dignity, not destruction; unity, gratitude, and anodyne ‘good deeds’ rather than protest or upheaval. This was not the revolution of mobs in the night, but rather an orderly revolution, one that maintained the existing social order in which Lyman urged his listeners to take their place.

18 Robb K. Haberman, ‘Provincial Nationalism: Civic Rivalry in Postrevolutionary American Magazines’, *Early American Studies*, 10.1 (Winter 2012), pp. 162–93, quotation at p. 165.

19 *Address by Theodore Lyman Jr.*, p. 10.

20 Young, *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party*, especially pp. 121–154, quotation at p. 154.

21 On labour struggles in the early republic, see Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788–1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

Like many of his contemporaries, Lyman believed that order could be maintained through proper reading. He therefore warned his hearers “to avoid books in which you find only amusement and no real instruction”. Instead, he continued, “it is of all importance to recommend to you diligence and perseverance in learning surely and accurately your respective crafts”, because “no man can hope to prosper and excel without constant zeal, toil and assiduity”.<sup>22</sup> Here, Lyman expressed a theme common to many such speeches: reading would make apprentices not only better citizens, but better workmen. A proper course of reading would make them more industrious, and thus more useful to their masters and customers – people like the speaker himself. While certainly industry and skill were useful assets to an apprentice seeking to rise in the world, the emphasis on performance of duty reflects an ingrained class division. Lyman did not suggest that apprentices might gain enough knowledge to rival his own Harvard education or to rise from labourers to gentlemen; rather, reading would keep them firmly in their own social sphere. In Lyman’s vision, a proper course of reading would secure the legacy of the Revolution, but that legacy would be a specifically class-stratified and conservative one.

Apprentices’ Library members both accepted and pushed back against the roles that Boston’s master mechanics and elites envisioned for them. In 1828, the master mechanics of the MCMA placed the library under the management of an elected committee of apprentices. Four years later, the masters relinquished control altogether, ceding both decision-making power and responsibility for upkeep to the Apprentices’ Library Association. The choices of library members after 1828 therefore reveal some of the ways that apprentices themselves envisioned their place in the republic. Like Lyman, they thought explicitly about their place in the developing nation. Also like Lyman, and perhaps more surprisingly, they insisted on clearly delineated class boundaries. But they also carved out new ideas about their role and transformed the library into a space for shaping and solidifying that role.

The most obvious way in which apprentices reshaped the library was through the books they collected. While the shelves still held a wide variety of volumes that an earlier generation would have approved as practical, moral and useful, such as Batty Langley’s *Builder’s Complete Assistant* and three volumes of George Bancroft’s *History of the United States*, there was a notable expansion in some categories. Although an 1831 debate “on the question ‘Is Novel reading beneficial to young men’” was “decided in the *Negative* by a large majority” of apprentices in attendance, by 1847 the library held more than 340 titles classed under “Novels, Tales, and Romances”, a genre scarcely represented

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22 Address by Theodore Lyman Jr., pp. 6, 9.

on the shelves in 1820. These included most of the era's popular fiction, including eighteenth-century works like Frances Burney's *Cecilia* and *Camilla*, the novels of Charles Dickens and Sir Walter Scott, and several Jane Austen novels (though not, apparently, either *Northanger Abbey* or Ann Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho*, at which *Northanger* explicitly pokes fun). For comparison, the only larger category was "Miscellaneous", which embraced religion, law, politics, dictionaries, letters, essays and lectures. After novels, the next largest category was "Science and Arts", with 185 titles, or approximately half the number of works of fiction. Thus, even considering the overall growth of the library, the number of novels on the shelves in 1847 represented an exponential increase. This turn to novels must have been partly practical; officers of the library stocked the books they knew would appeal to their fellow members, thus increasing the appeal of their institution and the odds of its longevity. But it also represented a rejection of elite suspicion of novel-reading and the embrace of a genre that tended to be characterised as worse than useless, for young men as for young women. It is important not to overstate the significance of novels. Boston's Athenæum also held volumes of Dickens, Austen, Burney and Scott; it even held at least five of Ann Radcliffe's semi-scandalous Gothic novels.<sup>23</sup> Christopher Phillips's chapter in this volume testifies to the extensive circulation of novels from a community library in the 1810s and 1820s, while other contributors highlight the tension between managerial aspirations and readers' preference for novels. The apprentices' choices, therefore, partly reflected widespread shifts in ideas about respectable reading. However, because these changes came to the Apprentices' Library only after control of the library came into the hands of the younger generation (whereas the Athenæum was collecting Radcliffe by 1827), and because elites tended to condemn novel reading for others even while embracing it for themselves, it is possible to read the collection as evidence of apprentices' sense of self-determination. In changing the composition of their shelves, apprentices were asserting independence from their masters.

23 MHS, MCMA records, series I, Vol. 1, 'Mechanic Apprentices' Library Association Proceedings, 1832–1834', 31 December 1833. *Catalogue of Books of the Mechanic Apprentices' Library Association, with the Constitution, By-Laws, &c.* (Boston, 1847), collection of the Massachusetts Historical Society. The 1847 catalogue lists approximately 1,750 titles, compared to 872 titles in 1,314 volumes in the earlier 1820 catalogue; *Catalogue of the Apprentices' Library in Boston To be Loaned, Gratis, under the Superintendence of the Massachusetts Mechanic Association, to the Mechanic, and All Needy Apprentices: with the Names of the Donors* (Boston, 1820), collection of the Boston Athenæum; *Catalogue of Books in the Boston Athenæum; to which are added the By-Laws of the Institution. And a list of its Proprietors and Subscribers* (Boston, 1827).

Just as they reshaped the library by choosing books, members seized the opportunity of independent control to invite lecturers, choose topics and even give lectures themselves. Extant records show library members in control of a cross-class leisure space where they seem to have embraced, at least in part, the middle-class ideal of uplift propagated by men like Lyman. Lectures given by members and invited guests took place in the library's rooms about twice a month except over the summer months and extended the educational work of the library. Of twenty-four lectures over a representative two years from October 1832 to October 1834, just over half were devoted to scientific or practical topics of some kind, ranging from electricity to geometry and from steam engines to the properties of matter.<sup>24</sup> Some, like the one on steam and steam engines delivered by Joseph Wightman in November 1832, would have been of practical utility to at least some members of the audience. Others, like those on silkworms and the honey bee, would have had less direct application to the everyday tasks of the audience, but instead would have served to extend their general knowledge of the world. Even these less directly applicable subjects, however, might have been considered to fall within the realm of immediate practical information for skilled labourers, and thus well in line with a traditional conception of what these men ought to know, fulfilling Lyman's admonition in favour of craft learning.

But the remaining lectures, nearly half, might be broadly categorised as relating to arts, politics and history, and thus fell further from the narrow realm of practical knowledge. In December 1832, for example, apprentices heard a lecture on Ancient Egypt; in January 1833, the apprentices heard consecutive lectures on sculptures and statuary and then on painting. The following March, the subject was biography. In December 1833, they attended a lecture on New Englanders' duties regarding slavery; this was closely followed in January and February by a lecture on demonology and witchcraft and one on Caesar, Newton and Washington.<sup>25</sup> What these disparate subjects have in common is that they range far beyond the basic and craft-specific knowledge once believed to be sufficient for young men training to be artisans.

That apprentices had more than a passing acquaintance with these broader topics is clear from the names of the speakers. While some lectures were given

24 I include in this category lectures on the following topics: Mechanical Powers, Chemistry, Steam & Steam Engines, "the pneumatic", silkworms, geology & mineralogy, geology, natural history: the honey bee, light (twice), the properties of matter, astronomy, and electricity; 'Mechanic Apprentices' Library Association Proceedings, 1832–1834'.

25 See 'Mechanic Apprentices' Library Association Proceedings, 1832–1834', 18 December 1832; 22 January 1833; 29 January 1833; 26 March 1833; 24 December 1833; 21 January 1834; 11 February 1834.

by invited guests, such as Stillman Lathrop of Brown University, who spoke on demonology and witchcraft, or the Revd E.M.P. Wells of St. Stephen's Chapel (Episcopal), most were given either by apprentices themselves or by honorary members of the association, recently aged out of their own apprenticeships and thus out of library membership. In addition, several of the speakers displayed mastery of a rather wide range of topics. George D. Miles, for example, then the Secretary of the Association, gave both the lectures on sculpture and painting and also two lectures on the properties of light. Similarly, library member William Aug. Weeks gave practical lectures on "the pneumatic" and mechanical powers as well as a lecture on biography. This range suggests that members were reading well beyond the national history and craft-specific volumes that Lyman had stressed. In this broader range, library members mirrored less the prescriptions of men like Lyman and more the reading such men envisioned for themselves. Indeed, the span of lecture topics echoes the "great works of learning and science" that were the object of the opulent Athenæum not far away.<sup>26</sup> Library members left no manifesto specifying their aims for the lecture series. Their sustained support for the series over a period of years, however, suggests that these aspiring artisans saw the broad range of topics as relevant. While they were certainly aware of a distinct class status (on which, more below), they envisioned a republic in which labourers, too, could appreciate painting and philosophy.

The lectures were also an important social outlet, a time for young men to come together after work hours to relax and be together in a somewhat less formal setting than, perhaps, a regular Library Association meeting. Perhaps most significantly, they were at least occasionally a site of heterosocial recreation. Generally, the library was a male space: there appear to have been no female members, and since only members had rights to use the library's books and rooms, only men would have been present either at meetings or during the library's open hours. By contrast, members were on occasion encouraged to invite friends of both sexes to the lecture series.<sup>27</sup> This invitation made the regular lectures one of a small number of sanctioned heterosocial occasions for young people. It is easy to imagine that conversation and courtship between apprentices and female guests were as much a draw as the content of any particular lecture.

26 *Memoir of the Boston Athenæum. With the Act of Incorporation and Organization of the Institution* (Boston: Munroe & Francis, 1807), p. 4.

27 See, for example, MHS, MCMA records, series I, Vol. I and II, 'Mechanic Apprentices' Library Association Proceedings, 1832–1834' and '1834–1835', 16 April 1833; 10 December 1833; 18 February 1834; 22 February 1835.

In addition, the lectures were a way of opening up the Library Association to a wider public. Inviting young women – whether sisters, friends or romantic interests – brought a new constituency to the library rooms, and perhaps gave more people a stake, albeit a small one, in the association's fortunes. Even more important in this vein were the invited speakers. When apprentices invited older members of the community to address them, they symbolically acknowledged their debt to their elders, helping to obviate concerns about restless single young men's activities. When community members came to speak, they symbolically endorsed the association, giving it a stamp of respectability. In this sense, then, the apprentices seem to have embraced, at least in part, the patina of middle-class virtue that the library's original founders hoped to inculcate.

Yet the Library Association's general disposition was clear. If the invited lecturers helped to solidify the library's place in the broader civic life of the city and demonstrate accession to developing middle-class norms, Boston apprentices worked out a different message through a series of staged debates. One Tuesday evening per month, appointed members of the association practiced their rhetorical skills, with two or three young men representing each side of a question. The debate would carry on for an hour or more, ending with a vote of all members present. The questions, debaters and vote tallies were duly recorded in the minutes, and show that apprentices defined their interests in class-specific ways.

Debate topics ranged widely, but all concerned matters of social or political significance, whether narrow or national. In one representative six-month period, from November 1832 to April 1833, the questions put to the apprentices for debate were:

In which situation did Gen'l Washington confer the greatest benefit on his country; as a Military or Civil Officer?

Which would be most beneficial to the United States, and the Southern Slaves; colonisation or emancipation?

Can young men of Mechanic or Mercantile employments, with a common education qualify themselves as well for the duties of highest public stations, as professional men of literary or scientific attainments?

Is Masonry compatible with American institutions?

Which has most influence in this country, Wealth or Talent?

To which are great men most indebted for their greatness, circumstances or natural talents?<sup>28</sup>

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28 'Mechanic Apprentices' Library Association Proceedings, 1832–1834'. November 6, 1832; December 11, 1832; January 4, 1833; February 5, 1833; March 12, 1833; April 2, 1833.

Thus, the topics of debate included matters of pressing national political importance (slavery), matters of personal prospects (qualifications for office), matters of ongoing and widespread cultural importance (masonry) and more abstract social and political questions (Washington, wealth vs. talent, circumstances vs. natural talent), with overlap between those categories. These were not unusual topics for the period; debating societies and lyceums across the country took up similar topics. But the apprentices addressed them with a distinct slant. Slavery, for example, was debated everywhere in America in the 1830s, and the apprentices could hardly have avoided participating in that conversation. In both their framing of the question and in their conclusion that colonisation was preferable to emancipation, however, they privileged a solution that would protect them from the competition of Black labour, whether enslaved or free.

The debate over Washington's legacy also brought the apprentices into an ongoing national conversation but from a specific perspective. As noted above, the memory of the Revolution was a source of contention in the 1830s, when class tensions and partisan acrimony divided citizens into opposing groups all claiming the Revolutionary mantle.<sup>29</sup> In debating the relative importance of Washington's military and civil achievements, Boston apprentices weighed the glory of armed insurrection against the building of permanent peacetime institutions of civil government. The vote, 15 to 10 in favour of Washington's military achievements, suggests disillusionment with government and the political process.<sup>30</sup> Following Lyman's exhortation to civic pride, the apprentices were engaged enough to take up such questions, but the debates' outcomes suggest that apprentices understood Lyman's subtext of class stratification as well. They understood that the Revolutionary settlement had failed to provide a place for them in the new political order. The military victory had achieved its aims and was to be celebrated; less so, the political establishment that followed.

Perhaps it was because the debates focused so much on apprentices' place in the social order that the members voted in September 1833 that "no Ladies" would be invited to witness them.<sup>31</sup> Since "Ladies" were explicitly invited to

29 Young, *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party*. For the Revolution's legacy see also Joyce Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

30 There have been many extensive studies of Washington's legacy. Among them, see Max Cavitch, 'The Man That Was Used Up: Poetry, Particularity, and the Politics of Remembering George Washington', *American Literature*, 75.2 (June 2003), pp. 247–74; see also David Waldstreicher, *"In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes": The Making of American Nationalism, 1776–1820* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

31 'Mechanic Apprentices' Library Association Proceedings, 1832–1834', 6 September 1833.

hear lectures, this cannot represent a total closing off of library space to young women. Instead, it may reflect a desire to preserve some homosocial space for young men to pursue recreation among themselves alone or to practice their oratorical skills before an audience limited to fellow members.<sup>32</sup> Alternatively, it may represent a concern that the pressing political topics of many of the debates were unsuitable for female ears. Yet a third possibility is that some debate topics exposed apprentices' vulnerabilities. A discussion, for example, of the qualifications for public office of mechanics with a common education necessarily involved unfavourable comparisons with academy-educated counterparts. Similarly, a debate that concluded that wealth carried more influence than talent would have highlighted apprentices' relative poverty and the unlikelihood of their ever accumulating much wealth. Topics like these may have made apprentices feel too exposed in front of their female peers. Thus, excluding young women from the audience may have been a means of self-protection; particularly for any young man who hoped to win the heart of one of those women, shielding her from an extended discussion of his liabilities may have been in his own best interest.

If this vote both echoed and strengthened an already pervasive gender barrier, other library activities helped Boston apprentices to set and defend social boundaries along both occupational and age-based lines. Like their masters, artisan apprentices sought to set themselves apart from common labourers on the basis of their skills. One of the ways to mark that distinction was through the trope of noise. Increasingly, artisans – like members of the middle class – described labourers as noisy and themselves as quiet. Noise became associated with dirt and poverty, while quiet became a mark of status. As historian Ari Kelman has explained, libraries as designated places for quiet reflection and reading were important markers of this distinction, locations for acting out the cultural trope that distinguished the skilled from the unskilled.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the apprentices' library, like the nearby Athenæum, had a rule specifying that "strict order and decorum shall be observed" in the reading room.<sup>34</sup>

32 For manliness/masculinity in early American, see Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

33 See Mark M. Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001). For libraries as a specific instance, see Ari Kelman, 'The Sound of the Civic: Reading Noise at the New York Public Library', in Thomas Augst and Wayne A. Wiegand (eds.), *Libraries as Agencies of Culture* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003).

34 *Catalogue of Books of the Mechanic Apprentices' Library Association, with the Constitution, By-Laws, &c.* (Boston, 1851), p. 7. This rule is found in Section 1, Article 4 of the By-Laws.



But the apprentices' library sought to bar more than unskilled social inferiors. The library's charter upheld class distinction overtly by specifying that members of the library had to be not only apprenticed to a member of the Massachusetts Charitable Mechanics Association, but also "learning a mechanic trade". Apprenticeship to a skilled craftsman was not sufficient; a young man who wished to join the library had also to be working toward membership in the ranks of skilled labour. This rule excluded not only unskilled labourers but also clerks and other white-collar workers who might work with master artisans but would never be artisans themselves. Thus, the Apprentices' Library charter demarcated class boundaries on both sides of artisanship, maintaining the library as a site of class solidarity. That the members would fiercely defend those boundaries is clear from a series of resolutions regulating use of the library. Over six months beginning in September 1832, the apprentices repeatedly affirmed that library privileges were to be reserved to apprentices learning a "mechanical trade", and could not be transferred to friends or retained by a young man leaving the trades for a clerkship in a store. In their final statement on the matter, a committee concluded that to allow such transfers would be "unconstitutional, incompatible with the provisos, and against policy and precedent". The emphasis in that decision, in its threefold rejection of a wider scope of membership, shows that the apprentices were intent on guarding the specific professional boundaries of their group. Even as they sought the kind of wide learning that characterised gentlemen, the apprentices were clear: they did not seek to become gentlemen, but rather to safeguard their artisan identity.<sup>35</sup>

It was just after the conclusion of that debate that the library's officers agreed to join with other young men's organisations in the Independence Day festivities, a decision they would later repudiate. In addition to participating in the Church exercises on 4 July, the Apprentices' Library raised independent funds for the Bunker Hill Monument (then stalled at just over thirty-seven of a planned 220 feet) on its own initiative.<sup>36</sup> By means of a subscription campaign

35 'Mechanic Apprentices' Library Association Proceedings, 1832–1834', 5 March 1833. Clerks might have been surprised to be thought desirous of joining a mechanics' organisation. Precisely at this time, such distinctions were being reinforced even more strongly from the other direction. Tamara Thornton, for example, shows that even penmanship was becoming a reliable marker of class and occupation; *Handwriting in America: A Cultural History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996).

36 Paul J. Weners, *Bunker Hill in History, Story, and Song* (Boston: self-published, 1930), pp. 24–25. See also George Washington Warren, *The History of the Bunker Hill Monument Association during the First Century of the United States of America* (Boston: J.R. Osgood, 1877).

among its members, the library succeeded in raising \$58, a sum considered evidence of the “liberality” of library members. Perhaps they were spurred on by public sentiment, which seemed to feel that young people should play a prime role in erecting the memorial. One correspondent to the *Boston Courier* asked, a month before Boston’s young men marched in honour of independence,

Where are the *Young Men of Boston!* Are they asleep! Have they lost all their energy! Will they make no combined efforts to do their part toward the completion of the *Bunker-Hill Monument!* We would call upon the Young Men’s Society, the Franklin and Boston Debating Society and every other Association of Young Men in the city to be up and doing. Let them not be inactive. They can yet put the cap stone on the Monument if they will but ‘go ahead’ in this matter.<sup>37</sup>

The young men’s joint efforts in marking independence earned the praise of the *Boston Evening Transcript*, which, while claiming that the Fourth had been marked in Boston with “no grand pageant – no imposing parade”, yet wrote that “no one who could look on [the young men’s procession] and reflect, but must have felt that under such influences the destiny of our beloved country would be safe, – no one could look on and not wish that every city and town in the Union, could call into action thrice three hundred such”. Appearing in a column that called the annual oration in Old South Church “threadbare” and lamented that “the customary exercises have lost their former interest”, this was high praise indeed.<sup>38</sup>

Yet at least some apprentices evaluated the event less favourably. Commenting in his semi-annual report that fall, Library President Francis Parsons called the library’s participation in July’s events “very creditable”, but expressed his hope that such activities would “never again be attempted, or if attempted, be discountenanced, by this Institution”. It is difficult to understand the source of his displeasure, which was evidently shared by his fellow members. The *Transcript*, at least, had praised the young men’s affair as the highlight of the day, and no newspaper recorded any shameful incident connected with the celebrations. What little evidence exists for why he judged so negatively what Boston’s newspapers had lauded as “conducted with perfect order and propriety” comes in Parsons’s commentary on the Bunker Hill fundraising

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37 *Boston Courier*, 19 June 1833, p. 2, emphasis in the original. On the significance of the phrase “go ahead”, see Scott A. Sandage, *Born Losers: A History of Failure in America*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), especially Chapter 1.

38 *Boston Evening Transcript*, 5 July 1833, p. 2.

effort. Recalling the “humiliating circumstances under which” the members had raised the funds, he recommended that “the Society will do well hereafter to attempt nothing which cannot be performed – completely performed – by the exertions of its own active members”.<sup>39</sup> It is possible that what Parsons found troubling was the way that fundraising resembled dependence; though they sought money for a public cause and not for private sustenance, the campaign put apprentices in the position of supplicants. Parsons’s language suggests that he sought for the Library Association a measure of the independence that, at the national scale, the joint activity of the parade was meant to celebrate. We might, then, read Parsons’s evaluation as of a piece with the regulations against transferring membership; both moves sought to maintain the class-specific character of the library as an artisan institution. Debating, lyceum and Bible societies – fellow 4 July paraders – collapsed class boundaries by explicitly seeking to curate middle-class tastes and middle-class morals; the library’s apprentices sought by contrast to emphasise their independence. Ironically, in order to celebrate the nation’s independence, they had had to cede a measure of their own. In the decades to come, they would choose otherwise.

Despite Parsons’s grumpy disavowal of all joint projects, the Library Association marched through Boston again exactly one year later, on Independence Day 1834. This time, members did so not with their age-mates but with the newly-organised Boston Trades Union. Like its New York and national counterparts, organised in the same year, the Trades Union brought together artisans across a wide range of trades. (More than a thousand members of at least twelve trades marched in Boston on 4 July.) Excluded were waged workers in the region’s growing textile factories, including the mostly-female workers in the sprawling – and activist – Lowell mills.<sup>40</sup> Thus, this later procession emphasised class solidarity and a specifically artisan interpretation of the Revolution’s legacy. No longer would Boston’s apprentices be content to represent “the destiny of our beloved country” as defined by non-artisans; instead, they stood quite literally with others of their own class, now more explicitly defined.

Its participation in the two processions shows the ways that the Mechanic Apprentices’ Library Association of Boston used an institution built on the theoretically private activity of reading to assert its claim to a specific kind of

39 ‘Mechanic Apprentices’ Library Association Proceedings, 1832–1834’, 3 September 1833. *Boston Evening Transcript*, 5 July 1833.

40 MHS, MCMA records, series 1, Vol. 2, ‘Mechanic Apprentices’ Library Association Proceedings, 1834–1835’, 2 September 1834. Teresa Anne Murphy, *Ten Hours’ Labor: Religion, Reform, and Gender in Early New England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 32–47, 73–74.

public role. Moreover, the contrast between the first and second events illustrates the ways that young artisans inverted the usual script that sees reading as an agent of democratisation. In the mid-1830s, artisan apprentices moved increasingly away from identification with middle-class neighbours in favour of a more precisely delineated identity as craftsmen. Though historians have usually described the great threat to artisans as coming from the unskilled labour of proto-industrialised factories, the evidence of the Mechanic Apprentices' Library shows that apprentices themselves withdrew from association across class lines in both directions. This withdrawal was not a wholesale rejection of developing middle-class norms; just as the lecture series improved apprentices' knowledge of painting and philosophy, the Apprentices' Library began its own elocution class in 1835. What is significant here is not that apprentices sought the kinds of public-speaking skills also taught in elite academies, but that they chose to do so on their own terms rather than joining in the pre-existing Debating Society. Though they had marched with the Debating Society in 1833, by 1835 the apprentices insisted on a parallel rather than shared institution.<sup>41</sup>

In other words, precisely at the moment when the Apprentices' Library seemed to be merged into a collective civic character, Parsons and his fellow apprentices reiterated their desire for a distinct identity. At a time when artisans were rapidly losing their skilled status and the very nature of the social system, with its designated space for skilled labour, seemed to be in flux, the library became a site of stability and the basis for one kind of self-definition. Though they accepted some elements of the prescription handed down by elders who saw them as keepers of the national character and protectors of its future, apprentices ultimately rejected the idea of the library as a democratising or assimilationist enterprise. Instead, it became a place to work out the contours of artisan identity against both the hardening of a class-stratified economic system and the rhetoric of a democratisation born through print. Succeeding generations of apprentices would maintain the library as an independent, artisan-specific institution until 1892, long past the expiration dates of many counterparts and almost four decades past the opening of the Boston Public Library. Although the Apprentices' Library's circulating collection saw heavy use in these years, testifying to the importance of the access to books it provided, it may be still more important as a window onto identity formation, class stratification in the supposed age of democratisation, and the ways that Americans in the age of Jackson harnessed memory of the Revolution for local ends.

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41 'Mechanic Apprentices' Library Association Proceedings, 1834–1835', 17 June–4 July 1834; MHS, MCMA records, series 1, Vol. 2, 'President's Report', 2 September 1834.

**PART 4**

*Public Libraries*





## Reading Publics: Books, Communities and Readers in the Early History of American Public Libraries

Tom Glynn

In 1851, Charles Coffin Jewett, then the librarian of the Smithsonian Institution and later superintendent of the Boston Public Library, compiled his *Notices of Public Libraries in the United States of America*. In his introduction, Jewett explained that he meant by the term “libraries which are accessible – either without restriction, or upon conditions with which all can easily comply – to every person who wishes to use them .... In this sense I believe it may be said that all libraries in this country, which are not private property ... are public libraries”.<sup>1</sup> In 1876, the United States Bureau of Education published its exhaustive *Public Libraries in the United States of America, their History, Condition, and Management*. In a chapter on the organisation and management of public libraries, William Frederick Poole, head librarian of the Chicago Public Library, offered the following definition: “The ‘public library’ which we are to consider is established by state laws, is supported by local taxation and voluntary gifts, is managed as a public trust, and every citizen of the city or town has an equal share in its privileges”.<sup>2</sup> It would therefore seem at first glance that in just a quarter of a century there was a dramatic change, a sharp break in the way Americans defined public libraries. In fact, the public library as described by

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- 1 Charles C. Jewett, *Notices of Public Libraries in the United States* (Washington: Printed for the House of Representatives, 1851), p. 4. This was printed as an appendix to: Congress, *Fourth Annual Report of the Smithsonian Institution*, 31st Cong., 1st sess., 1850, S. Doc. 120, Serial Set 564. Jewett’s report is by no means comprehensive, but it was the first attempt to describe all of the “public libraries” in the United States. Most of the work comprises descriptions of individual libraries, arranged by state and municipality.
  - 2 William F. Poole, ‘The Organization and Management of Public Libraries’, in United States Bureau of Education, *Public Libraries in the United States of America: Their History, Condition and Management*, Special Report, Pt 1 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1876), p. 477. This monumental work was published around the same time as the founding convention of the American Library Association and the first issue of *Library Journal*, the official organ of the ALA. In addition to descriptions of libraries in the major cities and statistical summaries of public libraries nationwide, it includes essays on all types of libraries and various aspects of library science, such as reference, management, and cataloguing.

Poole evolved over time from the collections Jewett described in *Notices of Public Libraries*. That evolution sheds light on the communities of readers served by public libraries, on the public and private values associated with reading, and on fundamental changes in how public institutions in the United States were conceived, governed and supported.

### Public and Private in America's Social Libraries

Many of the libraries in Jewett's *Notices of Public Libraries* were not truly public, even given his very broad definition of the term. The seven categories in his statistical summary include, for example, the libraries maintained by college literary societies. Developed for recreational reading and to prepare for debates, for most of the nineteenth century these collections were more heavily used than the college library itself, but it is highly unlikely that members of the general public were ever granted access.<sup>3</sup> The only collections that were accessible without restriction were the school-district libraries. By 1851 most states had passed laws permitting local school districts to levy taxes to purchase books not just for pupils in the common schools, but for any resident of the district. Intended to circulate good books to the home of every citizen, most of the libraries in Jewett's statistical summary were school-district libraries. They were essentially a noble but failed experiment in the history of American public libraries. Poorly funded and maintained, by 1876 they had been, according to a report in *Public Libraries in the United States*, "allow[ed] ... to sink into neglect and contempt".<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, a number of

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3 Jewett, *Notices of Public Libraries*, pp. 189–91. The seven categories in Jewett's statistical summary are: state libraries; social libraries; college libraries; student literary society libraries; libraries of professional schools, academies, etc.; libraries of learned societies; and school-district libraries. He did not include the many Sunday school libraries, "which have a vast influence in forming the intellectual as well as the moral character of the people". The literary societies were the heart of student social life for most of the nineteenth century and their libraries were generally well maintained and heavily used. Thomas Spencer Harding, 'College Literary Societies: Their Contribution to the Development of Academic Libraries, 1815–1876: I. The Golden Age of College Society Libraries, 1815–40', *Library Quarterly*, 29.1 (Jan 1959), pp. 1–26; Thomas Spencer Harding, 'College Literary Societies: Their Contribution to the Development of Academic Libraries, 1815–1876: II. The Decline of College Society Libraries, 1841–76', *Library Quarterly*, 29.2 (April 1959), pp. 94–112.

4 In the statistical summary, 9,505 of 10,199 libraries are school-district libraries. Jewett, *Notices of Public Libraries*, p. 191. Some of the states have entries that summarise the school-district libraries. 'School and Asylum Libraries', in Bureau of Education, *Public Libraries in the U.S.*,



public library systems today, including St. Louis, Cleveland, Detroit, Cincinnati and Indianapolis trace their origin to a school-district library. Moreover, the school-district libraries, according to an early history of the public library movement published by the American Library Association, helped to establish the principle of public support for publicly accessible collections.<sup>5</sup>

More important for the future development of public libraries in the United States were the ubiquitous social libraries.<sup>6</sup> According to Jewett, “in some states, almost every town has, under some name, a social library”. These were shared collections of books established and maintained by voluntary associations of readers. There were several different types. Proprietary libraries were joint-stock corporations. Members owned stock, a share in the library, that could be sold, transferred as a gift, or bequeathed in a will. Shares were expensive, sometimes costing hundreds of dollars, so these libraries were, by their nature, elitist and exclusive. Some, the Boston Athenaeum for example, even placed limits on the numbers of shares in order to preserve that exclusivity.<sup>7</sup> Members of the more numerous and more popular subscription libraries simply paid an annual fee to borrow books. Many were open to any member of the reading public, while others catered to a particular reading community. There were, for instance, social libraries for physicians and attorneys, women’s libraries, young men’s libraries, and mechanics’ libraries for artisans. By far the most successful type was the mercantile library. Founded and managed by young clerks, many of them would allow members of the general public to join for a slightly higher annual subscription. According to a report in *Public Libraries in the United States*, in 1876 “the majority of our mercantile libraries are ...

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pp. 38–59. Most of this chapter describes the movement for school-district libraries in each state. Carleton B. Joeckel, *The Government of the American Public Library* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935), pp. 8–13; 111–50.

- 5 Phyllis Dain, ‘American Public Libraries and the Third Sector: Historical Reflections and Implications’, *Libraries & Culture*, 31.1 (Winter 1996), pp. 56–84, at p. 60. Charles Knowles Bolton, *American Library History* (Chicago: American Library Association Publishing Board, 1911), p. 10. This is a “chapter” in *Manual of Library Economy*. Apparently the manual was never published as a single volume; each chapter was issued as a separate pamphlet. Sidney Ditzion, ‘The School-District Library, 1835–55’, *Library Quarterly*, 10.4 (Oct 1940), pp. 545–77.
- 6 Patrick M. Valentine, ‘America’s Antebellum Social Libraries: A Reappraisal in Institutional Development’, *Library & Information History*, 27.1 (March 2011), pp. 32–51.
- 7 A share in the Boston Athenaeum was \$300 in 1851. Jewett, *Notices of Public Libraries*, pp. 19, 189–91. Jesse Shera, *Foundations of the Public Library: The Origins of the Public Library Movement in New England, 1629–1855* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949; repr., n.p.: Shoestring Press, 1965), pp. 54–85. Katherine Wolff, *Culture Club: The Curious History of the Boston Athenaeum* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), p. 143.

the only important public circulating libraries in their respective towns".<sup>8</sup> Most subscription libraries were relatively inexpensive, and therefore relatively accessible, democratic institutions. The Albion Ladies' Library Association in Michigan, for example, boasted in 1876 that its membership fee of just fifty cents was "almost nominal ... thus extending its privileges to all".<sup>9</sup>

Social libraries were considered public libraries, public institutions, not simply because they were accessible to the reading public, but, more importantly, because that accessibility presumably served a public purpose. This was explicit in the various enabling laws that permitted the establishment of public libraries, as well as the constitutions of individual social libraries. The first state statute respecting public libraries in the United States, enacted by New York State in 1796, held that "it is of the utmost importance to the public that sources of information should be multiplied and institutions for that purpose encouraged".<sup>10</sup> The preamble to the constitution of the Mercantile Library Association of the City of New York stated that it was founded to "extend our information upon mercantile and other subjects of general utility".<sup>11</sup> Reading good books – science, history, the classics – would promote the public good by nurturing an enlightened, productive, informed citizenry. More important, however, was the presumption of an intimate connection between mental and moral improvement. An address published in the *Connecticut Courant* in 1774, for example, soliciting readers for a proposed subscription library, held that "the utility of public libraries, consisting of well chosen books ... and their

8 Bureau of Education, *Public Libraries in the U.S.*, p. 380. Mercantile libraries "are in fact open to anybody who pays the moderate fee". There are also reports, separate chapters, for YMCA libraries and law and medical libraries. Sidney Ditzion, 'Mechanics' and Mercantile Libraries', *Library Quarterly*, 10.2 (April 1940), pp. 192–219.

9 A.F. Bixby and A. Howell, comps., *Historical Sketches of the Ladies' Library Associations of the State of Michigan* (Adrian, MI: Times and Expositor Steam Press, 1876). William I. Fletcher, *Public Libraries in America*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1894), p. 11. A subscription of just fifty cents was exceptional. The Mercantile Library Association of the City of New York, for example, charged five dollars in 1851 for readers who were not employed in mercantile establishments. Jewett, *Notices of Public Libraries*, p. 84.

10 An Act to Incorporate Such Persons as May Associate for the Purpose of Procuring and Erecting Public Libraries in this State, The Revised Statutes of the State of New York, as Altered by Subsequent Legislation, ch. 18, tit. 9 (Gould, Banks 1852) (passed April 1, 1796). On enabling acts, see Shera, *Foundations of the Public Library*, pp. 61–64.

11 The original constitution is reprinted in 'At a Meeting of the Subscribers to the Mercantile Library Association', *National Advocate for the Country*, 27 November 1820. There are fewer references to public utility in official documents relating to libraries later in the century. For example, when the Mercantile Library wrote a new constitution in 1870 there was no preamble.

smiling aspect on the interests of Society, Virtue, and Religion are too manifest to be denied".<sup>12</sup> This conviction that good books engendered good morals was fundamental to the growth of social libraries in the United States. Social libraries, private voluntary associations of readers, were synonymous with public libraries for much of the nineteenth century because they were presumed to promote the public good.

In a lecture delivered in Boston in 1838 on "The Elevation of the Laboring Portion of the Community", Unitarian minister William Ellery Channing urged that "every man, if possible, gather some good books under his roof, and obtain access for himself and his family to some social library". Although many social libraries charged a quite reasonable annual subscription, and books themselves were becoming more affordable in the 1830s and 1840s, even a small private library or access to a public library was often beyond the means of the working class.<sup>13</sup> Most readers, however, could afford to patronise the more numerous and more popular circulating libraries. The main competitor to the social library, these were for-profit concerns, often part of a stationary or bookstore, but also available in a wide variety of commercial establishments, including dry-goods stores and millinery shops.<sup>14</sup> For a small fee, they rented out books and periodicals, usually on a weekly basis, and were, according to

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- 12 Quoted in 'Proprietary Libraries: Round Table Meeting', in *Papers and Proceedings of the Twenty-Eighth General Meeting of the American Library Association* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1906), p. 270. This association of good books and good morals is commonly referred to founding documents. See for example, the articles of association of a social library in Maine in 1801, which agreed to "to promote the diffusion of useful knowledge, piety and virtue"; Bureau of Education, *Public Libraries in the U.S.*, p. 446.
  - 13 William Ellery Channing, *Lectures on the Labouring Portion of the Community* (Boston: Crosby and Nichols, 1863), p. 55. Channing's address in 1838 was immediately before the first 'paperback revolution' from 1839 to 1845. Especially later in the nineteenth century, paperback publishers were competitors of the public library. Late in the century, even 'good books' could be purchased in cheap editions. On the first 'paperback revolution', see John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States* (New York: R.R. Bowker, 1972), i.242–45 and Frank L. Schick, *The Paperbound Book in America: The History of Paperbacks and Their European Background* (New York: R.R. Bowker, 1958), pp. 48–50. All types of libraries also faced competition from periodicals and especially newspapers, the "penny-press", both of which published fiction. See for example, Ronald J. Zboray, *Fictive People: Antebellum Economic Development and the American Reading Public* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 126–29 and George H. Douglas, *The Golden Age of the Newspaper* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1999), pp. 1–10.
  - 14 Preface to a catalogue quoted in David Kaser, *A Book for a Sixpence: The Circulating Library in America* (Pittsburgh: Beta Phi Mui, 1980), p. 119. On the variety of establishments (including a tavern and a brokerage firm) that offered a circulating library, see p. 50.

a pamphlet published by the New York Lyceum in 1840, “the only collections open to all classes of people”. During the eighteenth and the early nineteenth century, their proprietors often stressed that they were not merely for profit, that, like social libraries, they served the public weal. In 1791, John Dabney of Salem, Massachusetts assured his customers that he provided “materials capable of forming the minds of individuals to solid virtue, true politeness, the noblest of actions, and the purest benevolence”. Yet by the time of Channing’s address, they mostly circulated popular novels. According to the New York Lyceum, “twenty-five to one is the proportion of fictitious to solid reading given by most of them”, thus allowing their customers to indulge in the “captivating, but dangerous and often disgusting and immoral works of fiction, which pour like torrents from the press”.<sup>15</sup>

The Lyceum’s pamphlet solicited support from public-spirited citizens to build a collection that would provide wholesome reading at a nominal fee to readers of every class. It would include only those books “that will have the effect of ... imparting knowledge and elevating the social and moral disposition” and exclude “all immoral and irreligious literature and works of fiction (except those of a religious or moral character)”. One part of the opposition to the provision of novels in public libraries throughout the nineteenth century was simply that they were merely recreational, designed solely for the reader’s private amusement and therefore served no public purpose. More fundamentally, reading cheap fiction was viewed by many as not just frivolous, but mentally and morally dangerous. Works of the imagination appealed to the passions rather than the intellect, so that, according to the Lyceum’s pamphlet, “the mind surrenders itself to the interest and excitement of the story” and becomes “diseased and infatuated”. Citing “reports of some of the French hospitals for lunatics”, the Lyceum concluded that “the *reading of romances* is set down as one of the standing causes of insanity”.<sup>16</sup> Even much later in the

15 New-York Lyceum, *New-York Lyceum* (New York: n.p., 1840), pp. [1–2]. Available online in Readex’s American Broadside and Ephemera, Series I, 1760–1900. The Lyceum pamphlet was also highly critical of the public libraries in the city, including the Mercantile Library Association and the New York Society Library, a proprietary library. On the proportion of fiction in the circulating libraries, see Kaser, *A Book for a Sixpence*, pp. 66–67, 102 and Appendix II, 173–76; and Shera, *Foundations of the Public Library*, pp. 149–54. On advertisements and catalogues that promised an abundant selection of novels, see for example, Tom Glynn, *Reading Publics: New York City’s Public Libraries, 1754–1911* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), p. 120.

16 New-York Lyceum, *New-York Lyceum*, pp. [1–2]. The references to mental illness and popular novels are an extended excerpt from Horace Mann’s annual report in 1840 for the Massachusetts Board of Education.

century, many supporters of the public library movement believed there was a direct correlation between popular novels and mental illness. In 1875, the annual report of the trustees of the Boston Public Library claimed that “a vast range of ephemeral literature, exciting and fascinating” was “responsible for an immense amount of mental disease and moral irregularities”.<sup>17</sup>

Female readers were presumed to be especially susceptible to the dangerous allure of popular fiction. As late as 1877, the *Detroit Free Press* reported the sad case of a young woman “of fine education, who gratified a vitiated taste for novel reading till her reason was overthrown, and she has, in consequence, been for several years an inmate of an insane asylum”. Even those women who were not driven mad, were considered to be mentally enfeebled and morally compromised by a rapacious desire for thrilling romances.<sup>18</sup> This presumed nexus between gender and debasing fiction is one key to understanding how reading was idealised in public libraries throughout the nineteenth century. Reading ‘solid’ books was rational and therefore masculine. Reading popular novels was frivolous and feminine. Non-fiction was self-improving and therefore promoted the public good. Fiction was private, self-indulgent and demoralising. The idealised reader thus reflected gendered values that distinguished the public from the private in American culture. Women were, of course, assumed to be the mainstay of the circulating libraries. A proprietor of the Boston Athenaeum for example wrote that they “contented themselves with the more insidious forms of corruption ... to be had at circulating ... libraries connected with stationers’ and bakers’ stores”.<sup>19</sup>

Ideally the collection of a social library was a source of “rational amusement”. It would provide subscribers or proprietors with reading that was both amusing and self-improving, that would entertain as well as instruct. These early public libraries, however, were subject to the same market pressures as the commercial circulating libraries. Fiction was popular. In order to survive,

17 Quoted in J.P. Quincy, ‘Free Libraries’, in Bureau of Education, *Public Libraries in the U.S.*, p. 395.

18 Quoted in Kaser, *A Book for a Sixpence*, pp. 119, 126 n. 6. The most frequently cited example is ‘Novel Reading, A Cause of Female Depravity’, *Monthly Mirror*, 4 (November 1797), pp. 277–79. The *Monthly Mirror* was a London periodical, but this article was widely reprinted in the United States; Frank L. Mott, *History of American Magazines, 1741–1850* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), p. 174.

19 Bolton, ‘American Library History’, p. 7. For a comparative study of the circulation of fiction for men and women, see Ronald Zboray, ‘Reading Patterns in Antebellum America: Evidence in the Charge Records of the New York Society Library’, *Libraries & Culture*, 26.2 (Spring 1991), pp. 301–33, which finds little difference in male and female reading for 1847 to 1849 and 1854 to 1856.

to retain their membership, they were, in the words of the New York Lyceum's highly critical pamphlet from 1840, "obliged to comply with the general requirements of their frequenters". Moreover, the social libraries were democratic institutions. Members elected a board of directors or trustees, which was accountable to a dues-paying constituency. All of this meant that, although they never collected the same proportion of popular fiction as the circulating libraries, social libraries increasingly provided and circulated, along with more substantial works, books that were, again according to the New York Lyceum, a "light and trifling kind of reading". This was often at odds with a library's identity and self-image as public institution. This conflict between private pleasure and the public good, between meeting the demands of the market and promoting the common weal is well illustrated in the annual report of the New York Society Library in 1858. On one page the trustees assured their constituents that "it is absolutely necessary that several copies of every popular work be purchased on its first appearance". On the very next page, they went on to claimed that the "shareholders naturally expect their Library to be kept up to the standard maintained by Institutions of a similar character". This tension between public purpose and popular demand, between the public and private functions of shared reading, was fundamental to the character of American social libraries in the nineteenth century.<sup>20</sup>

### The Public Library Movement: Missionaries of Literature in the Gilded Age

In March 1848, the State of Massachusetts enacted the first legislation permitting the creation of a public library as defined by William Frederick Poole. It empowered the City of Boston to levy taxes to support a library in which "every citizen" had "an equal share in its privileges". Such an "enabling law" was a prerequisite to a library movement in any state and, according to William Fletcher in *Public Libraries in America* (1894), "the genius and significance of this modern movement are well illustrated in the establishment of the Boston Public Library".<sup>21</sup> In 1852, in the first *Report of the Trustees of the Public Library*,

20 New-York Lyceum, *New-York Lyceum*, p. [1]. New York Society Library, *Annual Report of the Trustees of the New York Society Library* (New York: John F. Trow, 1858), pp. 4–5.

21 Poole, 'Organization and Management of Public Libraries', p. 477; Fletcher, *Public Libraries in America*, p. 16. The brief enabling act for the Boston Public Library is quoted in full in Shera, *Foundations of the Public Library*, p. 175. On library legislation, see especially, United States Bureau of Education, *Statistics of Libraries and Library Legislation in the*

George Ticknor explained “the objects to be attained ... and the best mode of effecting them”. He held that any type of social library “falls far short of the aid and encouragement which [should] be afforded to the reading community”. The city’s new library would instead be modelled upon its public schools. It would expand and supplement public education by allowing every citizen to gratify the taste for salutary reading nurtured in the primary schools. In doing so, it would, like the public schools, serve a public purpose and promote the public good. The Library’s trustees intended, “as a matter of public policy and duty”, to provide Bostonians with “the means of self culture through books” and thereby “raise personal character and condition”.<sup>22</sup>

Although Ticknor and other founders of public libraries in the later nineteenth century often emphasised, like the leaders of the public school movement, that these new, publicly funded institutions would benefit every citizen, they were clearly intended, at least in large cities like Boston, for working-class readers.<sup>23</sup> William Fletcher, in *Public Libraries in America*, devoted an entire chapter to “The Public Library and the Community”. He stresses the ostensible value of the library in “providing all classes ... with the means of culture”, its presumed influence on “not only the intellectual but the moral and spiritual life” of every reader. But he then refers specifically to the “meagre and stunted

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*United States* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1897), which states that “The act of 1848 for Boston is really the germ out of which has grown much of the library legislation in this as well as other countries”, p. 524.

22 George Ticknor, *Report of the Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston, July, 1852* (Boston: J.H. Eastburn, 1852). Shera, *Foundations of the Public Library*, pp. 276–90, includes a facsimile of the report. Quotations are from pp. 268, 273, 281, 287, and 286. The comparison of public libraries with the public schools is ubiquitous in the popular press and the professional literature during this early period. Ticknor was the driving force behind the establishment of the Boston Public Library. See also, George Ticknor, *Life, Letters and Journals of George Ticknor* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1909), ii.300–303. This is a letter, written in 1851 to Edward Everett, in which he makes many of the same arguments found in the first report of the trustees.

23 “Above all, while the claims of no class ... should be overlooked, the first regard should be shown, as in the case of our Free Schools, to those, who can in no other way supply themselves with ... interesting and healthy reading”; Ticknor, *Report of the Trustees*, p. 282. On the public schools and the urban masses, see, for example, Horace Mann, *The Massachusetts System of Common Schools; Being an Enlarged and Revised Edition of the Tenth Annual Report of the First Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education* (Boston: Dutton and Wentworth, 1849). Mann placed particular emphasis on the moral and cultural qualifications of public school teachers and observed that in a city “it often happens that the surface disease of coarse and untamed manners is aggravated and made virulent by moral distempers within” (pp. 70–71; 80–85; the quotation is from pp. 84–85).

intellects of the masses”.<sup>24</sup> Librarians proudly referred to themselves as “missionaries of literature”, and their mission, the aim of the public library movement in the latter part of the nineteenth century, was to civilise, to uplift the working class.<sup>25</sup> Public librarians sought to enculturate the masses with good books and thereby instill good morals and ensure an orderly, virtuous republic. Amidst the rising class tensions of the Gilded Age, the mission of the public library seemed particularly urgent. At a meeting in 1882 in support of the New York Free Circulating Library, one of the speakers called upon “rich men [to] aid in this work by bridging over the chasm between themselves and the less fortunate or wealthy classes [and] lay broader and deeper the foundations of society with a regulated liberty”.<sup>26</sup>

Like missionaries of the Gospel, the missionaries of literature were often women. At that same meeting in New York City in 1882, another supporter of the Free Circulating Library remarked that “the men who hover about the wings here ... are only ornamental; the real work is done by the ladies”.<sup>27</sup> G.B. Utley, the executive secretary of the American Library Association, estimated in 1914 that half of the public libraries in the United States were founded by women. Middle- and upper-class ladies, usually in women’s clubs and other voluntary associations, also played a leading role in raising funds for collections and lobbying for library legislation.<sup>28</sup> And, as in the public schools, female

24 Fletcher, *Public Libraries in America*, pp. 37–38. The mission of the public library to refine and uplift working-class readers is a commonplace in the professional literature and public documents of the period.

25 The term was used, for example, by J.N. Larned, Superintendent of the Buffalo Public Library, in his presidential address before the American Library Association in 1894. J.N. Larned, ‘Address of the President’, *Library Journal*, 19 (Conference Proceedings, 1894), pp. 23–24. For a good summary of the “public library idea” in the second half of the nineteenth century, see New York Free Circulating Library, *Twenty-First and Final Report of the New York Free Circulating Library, With a Sketch of Its History* (New York: The Library, 1900), pp. 23–24. The New York Free Circulating Library was the largest of a number of free libraries in the city that, between 1886 and 1901, were privately managed but publicly funded.

26 New York Free Circulating Library, *Library Meeting at the Union League Club, Jan. 20, 1882* (New York: The Library, 1882), p. 4. I am not arguing here that public libraries during this period were instruments of ‘social control’. Rather they were a means of *influencing* the working class, a term used much more frequently by proponents of the public library movement. On the social control theory and library historiography, see Glynn, *Reading Publics*, pp. 203–04.

27 New York Free Circulating Library, *Library Meeting*, p. 5.

28 *Official Report of the Biennial Convention of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs* (Portland, ME: Lakeside Printing, 1914), p. 561; cited in Paula D. Watson, ‘Founding Mothers: The Contribution of Women’s Organizations to Public Library Development in the United



librarians soon came to predominate in the workforce. In part this was simply a matter of economy. Because there were so few professional opportunities open to them, women were often willing to do the work for less than men.<sup>29</sup> More importantly, middle- and upper-class women were considered innately well suited to the uplifting, enculturating mission of the public library. Public librarianship was regarded as a natural extension of a woman's nurturing, maternal role from the domestic to the public sphere. The stereotypical image of the refined lady librarian thus co-existed with the older, yet still prevalent stereotype of women as frivolous devourers of cheap novels.<sup>30</sup>

Public libraries' policies regarding the provision of popular fiction varied widely. William Kite, the librarian in Germantown, Pennsylvania, gained national attention by his refusal to purchase any fictional works whatever. He held that the "blighting influence of the sensational literature of the day" was "enfeebling the very flower of our nation" and that providing only wholesome reading instead would "help form a character for good that might otherwise be led to evil". By contrast, the Boston Public Library furnished, in multiple copies, what George Ticknor's report in 1852 referred to as "the more respectable of the popular books, ... the pleasant and popular literature of the day".<sup>31</sup>

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States', *Library Quarterly*, 64.3 (July 1994), p. 235. See also, Paula D. Watson, 'Carnegie Ladies, Lady Carnegies: Women and the Building of Libraries', *Libraries & Culture*, 31.1 (Winter 1996), pp. 159–96.

- 29 On salaries for women in public libraries, see, for example, Melvil Dewey, *Librarianship as a Profession for College-Bred Women: An Address Delivered Before the Association of College Alumnae* (Boston: Library Bureau, 1886), pp. 19–21. In some respects, Dewey's views on the employment of women were fairly progressive for the time, but he claimed that they earned less than men in libraries in part because they were usually in poor health and because of "lack of permanence in the plans of women"; they will just get married and leave the profession, so why pay them decently. This speech was delivered shortly before Dewey founded, at Columbia College, the world's first School of Library Economy. Most of the students were women. F.B. Perkins, the librarian of the Boston Public Library, wrote that "the least satisfactory feature of our present library system is the excessive proportion [of] ... the cost of administration" and that "women should be employed ... as far as possible"; 'How to Make Town Libraries Successful', in Bureau of Education, *Public Libraries in the U.S.*, p. 430.
- 30 See especially, Dee Garrison, 'The Tender Technicians: The Feminization of Public Librarianship', *Journal of Social History*, 6.2 (Winter 1972), pp. 131–59. Among the "natural qualities" that Melvil Dewey considered essential to public librarianship were earnestness, enthusiasm, and "the housekeeping instinct"; Dewey, 'Librarianship as a Profession for College-Bred Women', p. 21.
- 31 William Kite, *Fiction in Public Libraries* (n.p.: Philadelphia: 1880), pp. 2, 7. Kite was librarian of the Friends' Free Library. Founded by the Quakers, it was open to all residents of

But Ticknor and most leaders of the early public library movement believed that circulating common novels was the first step in the “process of elevating the taste of the uncultivated masses”.<sup>32</sup> As William Poole of the Chicago Public Library explained in an early issue of *Library Journal*, since “the masses of a community have very little literary and scholarly culture”, it was necessary to lure them into the library with “such books as they can read with pleasure”. Librarians disagreed over the proper quantity and quality of popular novels for a public library, over the extent to which their collections should cater to popular demand. Most however agreed with Poole (despite statistical evidence in their annual reports to the contrary) that collecting at least some recreational fiction would nurture “the habit of reading”, and “once acquired, the reader’s taste, and hence the quality of his reading, progressively improves”.<sup>33</sup>

By the time of the founding of the American Library Association in 1876, small neighbourhood libraries, in close proximity to the homes of working-class readers, had become a defining feature of the public library movement.<sup>34</sup> They would serve, in the words of ALA President J.N. Larned, as “beneficent snares”, enticing the uncultivated masses to the branch library with amusing fiction and thereby fostering an appreciation of more substantial, uplifting reading. Directing the taste of the reader was the mission of the refined lady librarian,

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Germantown and made special efforts to attract working-class and young readers. It received no public funds at the time. Ticknor, *Report of the Trustees*, p. 283.

- 32 William I. Fletcher, ‘Public Libraries in Manufacturing Communities’, in Bureau of Education, *Public Libraries in the United States*, p. 410. On fiction in public libraries during this period, see Esther Jane Carrier, *Fiction in Public Libraries, 1876–1900* (New York: Scarecrow Press, 1965).
- 33 William F. Poole, ‘Some Popular Objections to Public Libraries’, *American Library Journal*, 1 (November 1876), p. 49. This is a paper that was read at the founding convention of the American Library Association. See also the discussion of his paper in the Proceedings section of this issue. One attendee remarked, for example, that “we shall all agree as to the duty of excluding immoral works, but will differ as to the dividing lines, in the use of fiction generally”; ‘Novel-Reading’, *American Library Journal*, 1 (November 1876), p. 98. I have found no evidence of ‘improvement’ from libraries’ circulation statistics from the period. For example, fiction comprised seventy percent of the circulation of the Boston Public Library in 1876 and seventy percent ten years later. Boston Public Library, *Twenty-Fourth Annual Report* (Boston: The Library, 1876), p. 55. City of Boston, *Thirty-Six Annual Report of the Trustees of the Public Library* (Boston: The Library, 1888), p. 31.
- 34 For example, in its final annual report, the New York Free Circulating Libraries explained that “small libraries at no great distances apart” were one of the “fundamental features” of the “Public Library idea”. New York Free Circulating Library, *Final Report*, pp. 23–24. The Boston Public Library was the first to establish branches, in 1870; ‘Branch Libraries’, *American Library Journal*, 1 (April 1877), pp. 288–89.

a “cultivated woman [with] a vein of philanthropy in her composition”.<sup>35</sup> According to Justin Winsor, superintendent of the Boston Public Library, she would “allure ... imperceptibly guide ..., as unwittingly as possible, from the poor to ... the good, and so on to the best”.<sup>36</sup> The public library gospel held that the missionary of literature was to cultivate personal relationships in the neighbourhood so that the branch library became an integral part of the community. The New York Free Circulating Library, for example, praised in particular those librarians who were able to “make friends ... and help ... without seeming to dictate”, which created “opportunities for guiding the reading of those applying for books”.<sup>37</sup>

However, articles and reports written by leaders of the public library movement do not fully reflect the experiences of readers in public libraries during the later nineteenth century. As late as 1910, a majority of Americans still lived on farms or in rural communities.<sup>38</sup> Small towns were more homogenous ethnically than urban areas and less divided economically. Librarians there were members of the community rather than philanthropic outsiders and seem to have been little influenced by the missionaries of literature in the public libraries in large towns and cities. Usually young, single women, often the daughters of prominent local families, they were less concerned with moral uplift than with giving their middle-class friends and neighbours what they wanted to read.<sup>39</sup> In Osage, Iowa, for example, the local librarian purchased books under the direction of the library committee of the City Council. Fiction comprised roughly forty-five percent of the public library’s collection, compared with just

35 Larned, ‘Address of the President’, p. 4. Samuel S. Green, ‘Personal Relations between Librarians and Readers’, *American Library Journal*, 1 (November 1876), p. 79.

36 Justin Winsor, ‘Free Libraries and Readers’, *American Library Journal*, 1 (November 1876), p. 64. Earlier in the nineteenth century, librarians assumed that exposure to good books would ‘naturally’ improve readers’ tastes. By 1876, terms such ‘influence’ and ‘guidance’ were regularly used.

37 New York Free Circulating Library, *Fourteenth Annual Report of the New York Free Circulating Library* (New York: The Library, 1893), pp. 12–13. New York Free Circulating Library, *Twentieth Annual Report of the New York Free Circulating Library* (New York: The Library, 1899), p. 27.

38 Gavin Wright, *Historical Statistics of the United States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), ‘Table Aa716–775 – Population, by Race, Sex, and Urban–Rural Residence: 1880–1990’. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/ISBN-978051132971.Aa684-1895>.

39 It is difficult to generalise about public libraries in rural areas during this period, but they do seem to have often been different from public libraries in cities, especially if they were not managed by professional librarians trained in the library schools that were founded beginning in the 1880s. See for example, Wayne Wiegand, *Part of Our Lives: A People’s History of the American Public Library* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 78–79, 149.

fifteen percent in the model *Catalogue of "A.L.A." Library* published in 1893. The library circulated works by popular novelists, such as Horatio Alger, Berth Clay, and The Duchess (Margaret Hungerford), that professional librarians in the American Library Association would have deemed too "weak and flabby and silly" to properly enculturate the reader. In contrast to the missionaries of literature, the library committee made "special efforts to select such books as will please the taste of all".<sup>40</sup>

The library in Osage, Iowa was typical, in important respects, of public libraries founded in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Public libraries were usually established and supported, at least in part, with private resources. Rather than making a large, initial purchase of books, as in Boston and Chicago, towns frequently took possession of the local proprietary or subscription library.<sup>41</sup> In 1876, the proprietors of the Osage Library Association donated their collection, making it free to any resident over ten years of age. The building itself, like many public library buildings during this period, was made possible by a private benefaction from a public-spirited philanthropist. Orrin Sage, one of the original developers of the town in the 1850s, donated approximately half of the funds to construct the Sage Public Library.<sup>42</sup> The City Council appropriated \$250 annually to the library committee to develop the collection, but this was not uniformly the case. According to statistics published by the

40 Christine Pawley, *Reading on the Middle Border: The Culture of Print in Late-Nineteenth-Century Osage, Iowa* (Amherst, MA: University of Amherst Press, 2009), pp. 61–116. "Weak and flabby and silly" is from a report of the librarian of the Young Men's Association of Buffalo, printed in *Library Journal* in 1882 (p. 93). The quotation regarding the effort "to please the taste of all" is from a local newspaper account (p. 68). Pawley compares two catalogues from the Osage public library to the *Catalog of A.L.A. Library*, one from 1876 and another from 1893. Both had three times as much fiction as the model collection from the American Library Association.

41 One of the reports in *Public Libraries in the United States*, for example, explained that public libraries "are, generally speaking, the outgrowth of social libraries"; Bureau of Education, *Public Libraries in the U.S.*, p. 445. Fletcher wrote that "most of them have grown up from ... an association"; Fletcher, *Public Libraries in America*, pp. 28–29. For brief histories of the founding of the Boston Public Library and the Chicago Public Library, see U.S. Department of Education, *Public Libraries in the United States*, pp. 863–66 and 894–95. Both cities received generous donations of books as well as money to create the original public library collection.

42 Pawley, *Reading on the Middle Border*, pp. 61–65; Wayne A. Wiegand, *Main Street Public Library: Community Spaces and Reading Spaces in the Rural Heartland, 1876–1956* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2011), pp. 47–52. On gifts to public libraries up to 1894, see Fletcher, *Public Libraries in America*, 'List of Some of the Principal Gifts and Bequests to Public Libraries in the United States', pp. 144–46.

Department of Education, thirty percent of public libraries in 1891 received no public funding.<sup>43</sup> In some towns a wealthy benefactor provided an endowment to support the library as well as funds to construct a library building, and in others the proprietors of the local library association provided free access to the collection to their fellow citizens.<sup>44</sup>

William Frederick Poole's definition of a public library in 1876, as a collection that was "supported by local taxation and voluntary gifts", was in a sense aspirational, an implicit argument for public support of public libraries. The common understanding of the term was in flux in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Certainly Jewett's definition in 1851, any library that was "not private property", was no longer valid even a quarter of a century later. Through the 1890s there were still more subscription and proprietary libraries than libraries supported by local taxation,<sup>45</sup> but by that time the social libraries were no longer considered public institutions. By the end of the century, most readers, if they gave the matter any thought, would probably have agreed with the simple criterion in William Fletcher's *Public Libraries in America*: any collection that was free to the public. A critical aim of the public library movement was to establish firmly the principle of public funding. Fletcher, for example, argued that "any community, once tasting its advantages, is ready to support [it] by taxation, paying the necessary expenses ... as cheerfully as it does those of the public schools".<sup>46</sup>

43 Fletcher, *Public Libraries in America*, pp. 152–54. The table on p. 154 shows a total of 566 public libraries in twenty states, only 399 of which were supported by local taxes. Fletcher does not include the twenty-four other states that had fewer than three public libraries. His numbers are derived from Weston Flint, *Statistics of Public Libraries in the United States and Canada* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1893). Flint included only libraries of more than one thousand volumes and acknowledges that his statistics are incomplete, since many libraries did not report on every category in his survey (pp. 9, 21).

44 See Flint, *Statistics of Public Libraries*, pp. 22–203. Some of the libraries in this main table show both "corporation" rather than "taxation" as the type of support and "free" rather than "subscription" as the type of access. However, using the table to determine the proportion of public libraries that were free to all, but received no public monies, is complicated by the fact that Flint's definition of a public library is very broad and includes, for example, school and college libraries. His definition is essentially the same as Jewett's in 1851, any library that is not strictly private. On endowments, see M. Emogene Hazeltine, 'Maintaining the Public Library by Endowment', *Library Journal*, 21 (March 1896), pp. 93–95.

45 Haynes McMullen, 'The Very Slow Decline of the American Social Library', *Library Quarterly*, 55.2 (April 1985), pp. 207–25.

46 Fletcher, *Public Libraries in America*, pp. 17, 152. Fletcher's definition of a "free public library" is one that provides both free circulation of books and free reference.

Ultimately, it was the “voluntary gifts” of one individual that did the most to ensure that public libraries were “supported by local taxation”. When Andrew Carnegie agreed in 1903 to erect a new building for the Sage Public Library in Osage, Iowa, he required that the City Council appropriate to the library each year at least one thousand dollars for operating expenses.<sup>47</sup> The significance of Carnegie’s philanthropy for public libraries lies not simply in the number of buildings he funded (1,689 in the United States alone), but rather that his contract with each municipality guaranteed that the public library received annually an amount equal to at least ten percent of the Carnegie grant.<sup>48</sup> In contrast to most other public institutions, such as the public schools, the development of public libraries has most often been a result of what today would be termed a public-private partnership. In the words of William Scudder, in a history of early libraries in *Public Libraries in the United States*, “the growth of the system has been in the conjunction of private beneficence with public aid”.<sup>49</sup>

### **The Modern Library Idea: Public and Private in Progressive Era Public Libraries**

Due in part to the Carnegie building programme, there was a dramatic increase in the number of public libraries founded in the Progressive Era. In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, there were 910 new libraries in the United States; from 1900 to 1919 there were 1,854.<sup>50</sup> There was still a significant proportion of readers without free access to books, especially in rural areas and in the South, where African Americans in particular were often denied service.<sup>51</sup> But by this time most states had established a library commission to promote and

47 Wiegand, *Main Street Public Library*, pp. 59–66.

48 See for example, Abigail A. Van Slyck, *Free to All: Carnegie Libraries & American Culture, 1890–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 22 and Theodore Jones, *Carnegie Libraries Across America: A Public Legacy* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997), p. 26.

49 Bureau of Education, *Public Libraries in the United States of America*, p. 35.

50 ‘Table 14 – Number of public libraries, distributed by date of founding, 1944–45’, in Willard O. Mishoff, *Public Library Statistics, 1944–45* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1947), pp. 28–29.

51 As late as 1920, forty-three percent of the population in the United States did not have access to a public library. This number varied considerably by region; for example, seventy-two percent of readers in ten southeastern states did not have access; ‘Appendix: People without Public Library Service’, in Committee on Library Extension of the American Library Association, *Library Extension: A Study of Public Library Conditions and Needs* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1926). See also, Cheryl Knott, *Not Free, Not for All:*

support public libraries.<sup>52</sup> One of the most important functions of the commissions was, according to Henry Legler, president of the American Library Association, in 1905, to “educate public sentiment so that a genuine desire for ... library privileges will manifest itself in the practical form of local taxation”. By the 1920s, a public library was generally understood to mean a collection that was tax supported; a “free library” without public funding was an exception to the rule.<sup>53</sup> After the turn of the century there was also a corresponding decline in the number of social libraries. Generally only the more exclusive proprietary libraries, especially those with generous endowments, survived the ascendancy of the public library. In a paper read before the American Library Association in 1906, William Fletcher held that “one thing that has kept [them] behind in the race has been the slowness with which they have waked up to the modern library spirit”.<sup>54</sup>

In January 1901, when the New York Free Circulating Library transferred its property to the New York Public Library, creating the nucleus of the Library's Circulation Department, the trustees explained that “the idea that this system

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*Public Libraries in the Age of Jim Crow* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015).

- 52 See for example, Gratia Countryman, ‘Lines of Work which a State Library Commission Can Profitably Undertake’, *Library Journal*, 25 (Montreal Conference, August 1900), pp. 51–54; and League of Library Commissions, *League of Library Commissions Hand-Book 1922* (n.p.: League of Library Commissions, 1922). In 1922, 40 of the forty-eight states had library commissions (pp. 4–6).
- 53 Henry E. Legler, ‘State Library Commissions’, *Library Journal*, 30 (Portland Conference, September 1905), pp. 40–45. Legler was the secretary of the Wisconsin Free Library Commission and the president of ALA in 1913–14. In 1923, of 2,788 libraries free to the public, 2,754 received public funding. Bureau of Education, *Statistics of Public, Society, and School Libraries, 1923* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1926), p. 2. Again, statistics here are incomplete, in part because only about two thirds of the libraries surveyed responded (p. 1). Between 1902 and 1912, in cities with populations over 100,000, local funding for public libraries increased two and a half times. Dain, ‘American Public Libraries and the Third Sector’, p. 67.
- 54 The Office of Education's statistical compilation for 1929 notes that the “falling off in the numbers of association or society libraries shows the trend towards publicly supported institutions”. Office of Education, *Statistics of Public, Society, and School Libraries, 1929* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1931), pp. 2, 6. Haynes McMullen claimed that after 1923 social libraries were just one percent of non-school libraries in the United States. Haynes McMullen, ‘The Distribution of Libraries throughout the United States’, *Library Trends*, 25 (July 1976), p. 33. ‘Proprietary Libraries: Round Table Meeting’, p. 271. On the surviving social libraries, see William Wendorf (ed.), *America's Membership Libraries* (New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press, 2007).

of circulating libraries is only for the use of the very poor has been superseded by the belief that it is an important adjunct of the city's educational system, and as such entitled to municipal support". They also highlighted, in their final annual report, the part the library had played in advancing the "modern library idea".<sup>55</sup> The modern library idea embraced the basic principle of the public library movement, the free circulation of good books from small libraries near readers' homes, but sought to broaden its influence and appeal by offering a host of new and innovative services. Public librarians, for example, collaborated closely with public school teachers, bringing books into the classroom and helping students with their homework after school.<sup>56</sup> Inspired by the modern library spirit, they created "travelling libraries" that circulated from churches, playgrounds, telegraph offices, firehouses, and even private homes.<sup>57</sup> The library building itself often served as a community centre, providing an auditorium and meeting space for neighbourhood clubs.<sup>58</sup> In the words of Arthur Bostwick, director of the St. Louis Public Library and the leading proponent of the modern library idea, there were a "thousand and one activities that distinguish the modern library from its more passive predecessor".<sup>59</sup>

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55 New York Free Circulating Library, *Final Report*, pp. 23–24.

56 Work with children was one of the hallmarks of the modern library idea. See, for example, Alice I. Hazeltine (ed.), *Library Work with Children* (New York: H.W. Wilson Co., 1917) and Arthur E. Bostwick (ed.), *The Relationship between the Library and the Public Schools* (New York: H.W. Wilson Co., 1914). Both are part of a series edited by Bostwick, *Classics of American Librarianship*.

57 See for example, the classic exposition of the modern library idea, Arthur E. Bostwick, *The American Public Library* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1910), pp. 108–16 and also that section of Bostwick's bibliography, p.378 (the bibliography is more extensive in the later editions). Travelling libraries also served rural areas without regular public library service, often with support from a state library commission. The Travelling Library Department of the New York Free Circulating Library was especially extensive and loaned out more books than many of its branches. New York Free Circulating Library, *Final Report*, pp. 43–46.

58 For three discussions of the public library's role as a social centre, see another title from Arthur E. Bostwick (ed.), *Classics in American Librarianship, The Library and Society* (New York: H.W. Wilson Co., 1920), pp. 431–58. In an introduction to this section, Bostwick reported that "community centre service is ... the newest phase of library work and the most convincing evidence of its socialization". Socialisation in modern library jargon meant a focus on people as well as books.

59 Bostwick, *American Public Library*, p. 2. This passage provides an excellent, concise summary of "the great multiplication of facilities in the modern public library". Before moving to St. Louis, Bostwick was the last chief librarian of the New York Free Circulating Library and the first chief of circulation of the New York Public Library.



One reason for the expanded scope of the public library during the Progressive Era may have been that many of the missionaries of literature were simply losing faith in the power of good books to improve the reader naturally, effortlessly. As early as 1894, in a survey conducted by the American Library Association, approximately seventy-five percent of the respondents believed it was not true or “doubtful” that “the reading of fiction leads to more serious reading”.<sup>60</sup> With “school work”, “readers’ advisory”, and other innovations, the modern librarian played a more direct, active role in elevating the taste of the reader. More importantly, the modern library spirit was attuned to the spirit of the times. Like other activists and reformers during the Progressive Era, progressive librarians were eager to experiment, to innovate, and to marshal their professional expertise for the improvement of society.<sup>61</sup> They also believed in an expansive, interventionist state, in “the state itself [as] a stimulative rather than a purely administrative power”. According to Asa Wynkoop, inspector of public libraries for the New York State Library, “the leaders of the modern library movement have taken their stand with those who believe that human betterment is to be promoted by the enlargement of the function of government”.<sup>62</sup> The rise of the modern public library reflected rising expectations of government service at all levels.

In his classic exposition of the modern library idea, *The American Public Library* (1910), Arthur Bostwick claimed that “the American public has come to consider the library as an essential part of its system of education”. However, unlike the public schools, the use of public libraries was not mandatory. In order to reach its full potential, it was, according to Bostwick, the “business of the library to deal with that part of the community that does not voluntarily come to it”. There was therefore a dynamic, entrepreneurial spirit evident in

60 Ellen Coe, ‘Fiction’, *Library Journal*, 18 (July 1893), pp. 250–51.

61 On librarianship during the Progressive Era, see Dee Garrison, *Apostles of Culture: The Public Librarian and American Society, 1876–1920* (New York: Free Press, 1979; repr., Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), pp. 206–25. Garrison focused in particular on work with children and the ‘Americanisation’ of immigrants. Progressivism was a complex, multifaceted, and sometimes contradictory movement, but the modern library spirit certainly reflected many of its most salient aspects. For a good, recent overview, see Walter T.K. Nugent, *Progressivism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). Librarians’ preoccupation with efficiency was also a very progressive characteristic.

62 Isabel Ely Lord, *The Free Public Library* (Chicago: American Library Association Publishing Board, 1914), p. 1. This is “chapter” six in the *Manual of Library Economy*. Asa Wynkoop, *Commissions, State Aid, and State Agencies* (Chicago: American Library Association Publishing Board, 1911), p. 1. This is “chapter” twenty-seven.

public librarianship in the Progressive Era that contrasted sharply with the staid, sometimes condescending manner of the missionaries of literature. *The American Public Library* held that “the modern ... library idea is simply tantamount to a confession that the library, as a distributor, must obey the laws that all distributors must obey, if they are to succeed”, and that the modern librarian, “like the successful distributor through trade is precisely he who does not sit down and wait for customers”.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, because the modern library was now understood to be a tax-supported institution, and the librarian therefore a public servant rather than a missionary to the working class, there was a radically different relationship to the reader. The local taxpayer was now, as Bostwick explained in an address in 1915, a “stockholder” in the library and the “boss” of the librarian.<sup>64</sup>

Like the proprietary library that was accountable to its shareholders, the modern public library had a fairly generous policy regarding the provision of popular novels. In part, this was simply a reflection of American society's more liberal, less censorious attitude towards recreational reading, a fading of the prejudice typified by those Bostwick dismissed as the “old-fashioned librarians”.<sup>65</sup> At the ceremony in 1902 marking the laying of the cornerstone of the New York Public Library's “marble palace for booklovers” on Fifth Avenue, Mayor Seth Low observed that “indeed ... many will read only that which amuses instead of that which deepens and instructs, but [this] is not to be despised, for there is a place in life for amusement as well as work”.<sup>66</sup> Librarians still vigilantly excluded those books they deemed unrefined or immoral, but most now viewed recreational reading as a harmless pastime,

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- 63 Bostwick, *American Public Library*, pp. 3, 26. This was a highly influential book in the profession. It went through four editions between 1910 and 1929, was formally endorsed by the American Library Association, and was widely adopted in library schools. However, Bostwick noted, even in the fourth edition, that “the broadening of the library idea ... has not taken place without opposition, nor is it accepted to-day, even by all librarians” (p. 2).
- 64 Arthur E. Bostwick, ‘People's Share in the Library’, in *A Librarian's Open Shelf: Essays on Various Subjects* (New York: H.W. Wilson Co., 1920), pp. 198–201. This was an address delivered to the Chicago Woman's Club. On business as a metaphor for public libraries, see Robert F. Nardini, ‘A Search for Meaning: American Library Metaphors, 1876–1926’, *Library Quarterly*, 71.2 (April 2001), pp. 121–23. Modern librarians stressed that the modern library was efficient and cost-effective, as well as entrepreneurial. The dominant metaphor in the nineteenth century was, of course, the public school.
- 65 Bostwick held that “a large part of the circulation of a public library will ... be fiction, and so long as this is of good quality there is no reason for being ashamed of it”; *American Public Library*, pp. 2, 152.
- 66 The New York Public Library, *Ceremonies on the Laying of Its Cornerstone* (New York: R.W. Crothers, 1902), p. 27.

rather than a stepping stone to more substantial works. At the American Library Association's conference in 1906, Lindsay Swift of the Boston Public Library told his colleagues that, since "most people read for pleasure ... with a modicum of serious purpose, that library which is the best purveyor is the library for me".<sup>67</sup>

The modern library's more generous provision of popular fiction was also an important part of the effort to popularise the library, to attract "that part of the community that does not voluntarily come to it". Echoing the entrepreneurial spirit that Bostwick promoted in *The American Public Library*, the American Library Association's manual for book selection, published in 1915, advised the modern librarian to "study his community as thoroughly as the successful merchant who buys clothing to serve its varied tastes".<sup>68</sup> The purveyance of fiction in the progressive era public library was also clearly influenced by the way its reading public was constructed. The modern library continued to serve the poor and the working class, especially in its efforts to 'Americanise' new immigrants, but, like school children, they were now considered a special class of reader.<sup>69</sup> No longer on a mission to enculturate the unlettered masses, the library was expected to satisfy, to cater to the 'customer', the middle-class, tax-paying, fiction-loving public. In an address before the American Library Association in 1903 on "The Purchase of Current Fiction", Bostwick defined "the great reading public" as "just you and I and some other fellows".<sup>70</sup>

Yet Bostwick's claim that the reader was now the boss was only part of the story. Like its funding, the administration and governance of the public library was, in practical terms, a mix of public and private elements.

67 Arthur E. Bostwick, 'The Librarian as a Censor', in *Library Essays: Papers Related to the Work of Public Libraries* (H.W. Wilson Co., 1920), pp. 211–139. The quotation from Swift is found in 'Proprietary Libraries: Round Table Meeting', p. 272. See also, Carrier, *Fiction in Public Libraries*.

68 Elva E. Bascom, *Book Selection* (Chicago: American Library Association Publishing Board, 1915), p. 10. This is "chapter" twenty-six in the *Manual of Library Economy*.

69 For primary sources on Americanisation in public libraries during this period, see that section in the bibliography in Arthur E. Bostwick, *The American Public Library*, 4th ed. (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1929), pp. 429–30.

70 Arthur E. Bostwick, 'The Purchase of Current Fiction', in American Library Association, *Twenty-fifth Annual Conference, Niagara Falls, June 22–27, 1903* (Philadelphia: The Association, 1903), p. 32. Nonetheless, what works of fiction should be excluded from the public library continued to point of contention for much of the twentieth century. See for example, Nora Rawlinson, 'Give 'Em What They Want!', *Library Journal*, 106 (15 November 1983). Providing whatever readers wanted to read was still considered controversial as late as 1983.

Whereas school boards were almost always elected bodies, the trustees of public libraries, especially in the larger cities, were often private citizens appointed annually by public officials. Moreover, since many of the libraries were founded in the nineteenth century as social libraries, some of them remained legally independent entities.<sup>71</sup> The New York Public Library, for example, is a private corporation, governed by a board of trustees that elects its own members and contracts with the City to provide library service for the public.<sup>72</sup> In general, because of reformers' largely unwarranted fear that the library would "encounter the practical certainty of its becoming one more corruptionist engine in the hands of city rulers", boards were designed to be largely independent of the municipal government.<sup>73</sup> However, since the city council or other municipal body appropriated a substantial portion of the library's funding, the city rulers always had significant influence over the board.

Finally, in regards to the provision of fiction, the modern public library had not one boss, but many; not a generic reading public, but its community's multiple reading publics. The library had to decide, given a limited budget, what to purchase and, just as important, what to reject. According to John Cotton Dana, director of the Newark Public Library, the modern public librarian should be, ideally, not a "missionary to his community, [but] instead ... a

71 Joeckel, *Government of the American Public Library*, pp. 24, 170–96. Joeckel demonstrated that in the history of American social libraries "the pattern for the future was thus clearly outlined: independent libraries [and] strong management by boards of prominent citizens" (p. 8). In 1935, approximately seventeen percent of the public libraries in cities of 30,000 or more residents were private corporations or associations governed by private boards (pp. 80, 344).

72 The founding and early development of the New York Public Library was unique and complex. It was originally the consolidation in 1895 of the Astor Library, the Lenox Library and the Tilden Trust. See Harry Miller Lydenberg, *The History of the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations* (New York: The Library, 1923), pp. 301–48. On the creation and membership of the NYPL board, see Glynn, *Reading Publics*, pp. 229, 250–51 and Phyllis Dain, *The New York Public Library: A History of Its Founding and Early Years* (New York: The Library, 1972), pp. 78–86.

73 "In this respect [corruption by political machines in the later nineteenth century], the record of the public library appears to be almost entirely clean"; Joeckel, *Government of the American Public Library*, p. 23. Joeckel qualified this however by observing that "perhaps the libraries were financially too poor and their salaries too low to attract the interest of the spoilsman". The quotation regarding "city rulers" is from Frederic Beecher Perkins, 'Public Libraries and the Public', in Arthur Bostwick (ed.) *Library and Society* (New York: H.W. Wilson, 1921; reprint, Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries, 1968), p. 233; this was an address delivered at the American Library Association annual conference in 1885.

hospitable Keeper of the Inn of All Comers". Yet as a practical matter he or she was constrained in book selection by local public opinion. Without some degree of "benign" censorship, there would "come to his shelves volumes which will arouse such antagonisms, such criticisms ... as will make his library a mere centre of controversy". And since "no librarian can always practice it to perfection", controversy did inevitably arise; readers served by the library disagreed at times over what titles were either included or excluded.<sup>74</sup> A new function of the modern librarian was to arbitrate such disputes. The public library became a contested space that helped to forge local consensus regarding a community's cultural and literary values.<sup>75</sup>

In order to understand the history of the modern public library in the United States, we have to start with the history of the social libraries of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The public libraries we know today evolved from these early public libraries. And that evolution sheds light on and is an important part of the history of books and reading. The history of public libraries helps us understand race, class and gender in the construction of the

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74 John Cotton Dana, 'Public Libraries as Censors', *Bookman*, 49 (March-August 1919), pp. 147–52, at pp. 147, 150, and 152. Dana emphasised that, as a practical matter, censorship was part of a librarian's job, because his or her budget allowed the purchase of only a fraction of the books published. For the most part, he resisted the anti-German hysteria during the First World War and the removal of "pro-German" books from his library's collection: "in this particular incident it was clearly shown that a librarian's censorship, exercised with discretion, is approved by his trustees, his community, and his local press" (p. 152). Dana also refers to the practice of placing controversial works in a restricted collection that required special permission for access. He referred to this as "censorship of seclusion" (p. 148). Librarians called it, among themselves, "purgatory"; Wiegand, *Part of Our Lives*, pp. 117–18.

75 Wayne Wiegand has shown that this is a defining and recurring theme in public library history; *Part of Our Lives*, pp. 5, 39, 168, 266. Arbitrating community consensus is a complex and "sometimes messy" (p. 269) process that involves "common readers", powerful, local elites, professional librarians and distant arbiters of culture. The profession did not take a stand against censorship until after World War II. Local library boards generally left the day-to-day operation of the library to professional librarians (Dain, 'Third-Sector', p. 65), but this was not always the case when complaints over book selection were raised. Oddly, in an extensive and detailed discussion of the principles that should guide the librarian in censoring books, Bostwick acknowledged the importance of local community standards, but only briefly and without elaboration: "every [librarian] must struggle with it for himself, having in mind the force and direction of his own local sentiment"; Bostwick, 'Librarian as a Censor', p. 133. This was Bostwick's presidential address before the American Library Association in 1908.

reader; the reception of fiction and the role the market played in what readers read; and the public and private goods that reading was expected to serve. Public libraries were also, from their inception, protean public institutions. Their history allows us to explore the shifting definitions of a public institution and the public good; and how, why and to what extent government was expected to promote that public good. The history of American public libraries is a critical part of the social, cultural and political history of the United States.

## From Voluntary to State Action: Samuel Smiles, James Silk Buckingham and the Rise of the Public Library Movement in Britain

*Alistair Black*

### From State to Voluntary Action: The Public Library in Today's Neo-Liberal Britain

The public library service in Britain today faces the “greatest crisis in its history”, according to the children’s author Alan Gibbons, speaking in 2016.<sup>1</sup> Across the public library system the lights are going out, not only literally, in terms of reduced opening hours and outright closures, but also figuratively, in respect of de-professionalisation and reduced services. Austerity measures have dimmed the shining example to the world that was once set by a proud and well-funded service. Despite re-assurances that the public library remains “a golden thread” running through people’s lives, a transformative institution which serves as “a supplier of an infrastructure for life and learning” and which, despite the growth of incorporeal digital technologies, satisfies a continuing demand for “modern, safe, non-judgemental, flexible spaces”;<sup>2</sup> the decades-long, neo-liberal driven trend in cutting spending on the institution has escalated sharply in the wake of the banking crisis of 2008, threatening the very fabric of the public library system. Statistics on the public library tell a sorry story. In the period 2010–15, 207 library buildings were closed across the country. This decline was barely offset by the few new libraries that were built and opened, many of them prestige-seeking flagship projects like the new, but now severely under-funded, Library of Birmingham (2013).<sup>3</sup> The number of paid staff in libraries fell from 31,977 to 24,044 in the same period. Most alarmingly,

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- 1 Quoted in D. Wainwright et al., ‘Libraries lose a quarter of staff as hundreds close’, *BBC News* (29 March 2016), retrieved 25 May 2016 from <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-35707956>.
  - 2 Department of Culture, Media and Sport, *Independent Library Report for England* [Chaired by William Sieghart] (18 December 2014), p. 5.
  - 3 A. Clawley, *Library Story: A History of Birmingham Central Library* (Birmingham: The Author, 2016).

the number of qualified professionals has collapsed: from 5,031 in 2008 to 2,460 in 2015. The size of collections, the number of visits and the number of items borrowed have also seriously declined.<sup>4</sup>

There is one statistic that has been bucking this trend of decline, however. Between 2010 and 2015 the number of volunteers working in public libraries increased from 15,861 to 31,403.<sup>5</sup> Voluntarism has grown in public libraries in both “involved” and “devolved” ways.<sup>6</sup> In the long-standing tradition of merely offering unpaid assistance to paid library staff, volunteer involvement in service provision has become much more conspicuous.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, in some localities the management of whole libraries has been devolved by local authorities to voluntary community groups. By March 2016 such “community managed libraries” numbered just over four hundred.<sup>8</sup> There are fears that, first, skilled library staff are gradually being replaced by less skilled volunteers and, secondly, that “community managed libraries” will not receive the expert guidance from local authorities that they need, or are able to exploit, leading to decline and closures by stealth.

This kind of civic-minded voluntarism chimes well with the post-Thatcherite Right’s ‘red Toryism’, or ‘Big Society’, discourse. Eighties Thatcherism drew a large amount of political capital from its claim to be the inheritor of values – among them thrift, self-reliance, moral restraint, love of family and empire and

4 See the following authoritative sources for trends in Britain’s public library service: J. Woodhouse and N. Dempsey, *Public Libraries*, House of Commons Briefing Paper No. 5875 (15 April 2016); Library and Information Statistics Unit, University of Loughborough, *Trends in UK Library and Publishing Statistics* (2015), retrieved 12 February 2015 from <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/microsites/infosci/lisu/lisu-statistics/lisu-statistics-trends.html>; Chartered Institute for Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), *Latest Public Library Statistics Released* (2015), retrieved 12 February 2015 from <http://www.cipfastats.net/news/newstory.asp?content=16056>.

5 Wainwright et al., ‘Libraries lose a quarter of staff as hundreds close’.

6 R. Child and A. Goulding, ‘Public Libraries in the Recession: The Librarian’s Axiom’, *Library Review*, 61.8&9 (2012), pp. 641–63; Woodhouse and Dempsey, *Public Libraries*, pp. 15–16.

7 Much research remains to be done on the history of the traditional kind of volunteering in public libraries. Public library services to hospitals have long used volunteer labour: M. Going (ed.), *Hospital Libraries and Work with the Disabled* (London: Library Association, 1963), pp. 67–70. In the mid-1930s the Library Association reported that many small libraries in rural areas still employed untrained part-time staff and the smallest villages were often still dependent on voluntary workers: T. Kelly, *A History of Public Libraries in Great Britain, 1845–1975* (London: Library Association, 1977), note 3, p. 309.

8 ‘List of UK volunteer libraries’, *Public Library News: What’s Happening to your Library?* (2016), retrieved 6 June 2016 from <http://www.publiclibrariesnews.com/about-public-libraries-news/list-of-uk-volunteer-run-libraries>.



minimalist government – that had supposedly made Victorian Britain great but which were said to be sorely lacking in a post-war Britain corrupted by a welfare state, a culture of dependency and a demoralising hedonism.<sup>9</sup> British neo-liberalism's list of 'Victorian values' conveniently omitted, unsurprisingly, the more distasteful aspects of Victorian society, among them the cruel employment of child labour, political exclusion (for example, of women before 1918), the subjugation of colonial populations and the immensely beneficial financial legacy of Britain's involvement in slavery. In connection with the first of these omissions, work, for example, a balanced perspective would address not just the nobility of hard work but also "the gross forms of exploitation which were practiced for so meagre a reward and frequently performed in atrocious conditions which broke the health and bodies of the workforce".<sup>10</sup> Further, the neo-liberal list of Victorian values also contained claims about their broad consequences that do not stand up to scrutiny. For example, the claim that British economy and society thrived because it was largely free of government interference has been countered by the argument that increasing state intervention was as much a Victorian trait as 'laissez faire' (more about this later).

Reincarnated in a 'Back to Basics' philosophy under John Major's government (1992–97), the 'Victorian values' proposition was given a new lease of life, it has been observed,<sup>11</sup> by David Cameron upon becoming Prime Minister in 2010. The prevalent theme of his 'Big Society' discourse, which has impacted public libraries alongside other public services,<sup>12</sup> was the need to shrink the boundaries of the state by encouraging in its place the formation of 'organic' citizen action – in short, the revival of the Victorian voluntary ethic in the tradition of charity organisations, religious foundations, forms of associationism like trader co-operatives, friendly societies and philanthropic efforts of various kinds.

9 J. Walvin, *Victorian Values* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1987); E.M. Sigworth (ed.), *In Search of Victorian Values: Aspects of Nineteenth-Century Thought and Society* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988); G. Marsden (ed.), *Victorian Values: Personalities and Perspectives in Nineteenth Century Society* (London & New York: Longman, 1990).

10 E.M. Sigworth, 'Introduction', in E.M. Sigworth (ed.), *In Search of Victorian Values*, p. 2.

11 Timothy Stanley, 'Conservative Nostalgia for Victorian Era is Dangerous', *The Guardian* (24 February 2011), retrieved 2 April 2016 from <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/feb/24/conservative-nostalgia-victorian-era>.

12 A. Goulding, 'The "Big Society" and English Public Libraries: Where Are We Now?', *New Library World*, 114.11&12 (2013), pp. 478–93.

### From Voluntary to State Action: The Early Public Library

The debate that has taken place in Britain in recent decades over the level of the state's involvement in people's lives relative to voluntary, independent action has filtered down to the level of the seemingly innocuous municipal public library. In 1986, in a critical report on Britain's public library system, the Adam Smith Institute attacked what it saw as the unfair subsidisation by the taxpayer of the 'entertainment' side of public library provision. The report was a throwback to M.D. O'Brien's critique of *free* libraries a century earlier. Terming them "Socialist continuation schools", O'Brien presented free public libraries as institutions for people who were not prepared to pay the market value for the books they wished to read. Because such people were reading at other people's expense, he argued, free libraries effectively pauperised those who used them, encouraging a culture of dependency. Whereas people were prepared to buy alcohol and tobacco, he continued, they were not prepared to pay for their own books. As with all forms of what O'Brien called "compulsory co-operation" ("State socialism"), municipal libraries, he asserted, were "the negation of that liberty which is the goal of human progress".<sup>13</sup> Like O'Brien, the Adam Smith Institute decried state-run libraries and called for a revival in private library provision, arguing that taxpayer-subsidised public libraries were standing in the way of such a renaissance. In fact, as the Institute's report itself rather clumsily admitted, public libraries had emerged in the early-Victorian

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13 M.D. O'Brien, 'Free Libraries', in T. Mackay (ed.), *A Plea for Liberty: An Argument Against Socialism and Socialist Legislation* (New York: D. Appleton, 1891), pp. 329, 348. The editor of the volume in which O'Brien's essay appeared, Thomas Mackay, was an energetic writer on political economy. *A Plea for Liberty* was prefaced with an essay by the social Darwinist Herbert Spencer, who had coined the term "survival of the fittest", popularly believed, incorrectly, to have been assigned by Darwin himself. Spencer articulated the law of "conduct and consequences" which announced that in keeping with the notion that all actions had outcomes the individual who best adapted to his environment would survive: S. Fine, *Laissez-Faire and the General-Welfare State: A Study of Conflict in American Thought 1865-1901* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1956), p. 34.

Elsewhere Spencer wrote of the "immense positive evils entailed by over-legislation": H. Spencer, *Man versus the State* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton Printers, 1960 [1884]), p. 161. O'Brien was also author of *Socialism Tested by Facts* (London: Liberty and Property Defence League, 1892). He was associated with the Liberty and Property Defence League and the England Patriotic and Anti-Socialist Association. He was reactionary in other ways, as an outspoken critic of homosexuality, for example: see his *Socialism and Infamy: The Homogenic or Comrade Love Exposed: An Open Letter in Plain Words for a Socialist Prophet* (Privately Printed, 1892).

age precisely *because* of the inadequate and/or exclusive service private, or voluntary, libraries were providing.<sup>14</sup>

Although touted for its qualities as a socially stabilising agency – which at times, as in the case of censorship or attacks on the reading of light fiction, took on the complexion of control<sup>15</sup> – the early public library was established, and eventually flourished, to satisfy an autonomous demand for reading and education in the second phase of industrialisation, in which production was becoming more complex and technical and non-manual service industries were beginning to grow. The demand came from a wide variety of social groups, including the middle classes who recognised the value of a generously funded local shared resource – a British Museum Reading Room on a smaller scale, if you like – compared to the relatively limited service most private, voluntary libraries could offer. This is not to say public libraries emerged from a blind faith in tax-funded agencies and a rejection of the voluntary spirit. Municipal, tax-based public libraries were in fact established by direct voluntary action. The Public Libraries Act (1850) permitted the founding of an institution by a local authority only after a referendum on the issue engaged in by those who paid local taxes.<sup>16</sup> But once a public library had been established support for its maintenance and development effectively became involuntary – that is, a

14 Adam Smith Institute, *Ex-libris* (London, 1986), p. 9.

15 R. Snape, *Leisure and the Rise of the Public Library* (London: Library Association, 1995). Melvil Dewey believed the state's involvement in library provision was important for the guardianship it offered against the dangers of pernicious literature and the flood of 'sensational' and 'objectional' reading that had arisen: M. Dewey, 'Relation of the State to the Public Library', in *Transactions and Proceedings of the Second International Library Conference, held in London, July 13–16, 1897* (London: Printed for members of the conference, 1898), p. 21.

16 The Public Libraries Act (1850), though providing the bedrock for a later flowering of public libraries, was a relatively limited, and therefore limiting, piece of legislation. In reality it took four decades for the public library movement to move into top gear. The 1850 Act permitted (importantly it did not compel) any municipal borough with a population of 10,000 or more to become a library authority and establish a public library funded from local taxation (the rates). However, it could only do this if it: charged ratepayers no more than ½d. in the £ (one half-penny in the pound) for the purpose; spent the money only on facilities and staffing (books and other printed materials could not be purchased from the library fund); and received permission from ratepayers in a special poll (two-thirds, or more, of ratepayers voting were required to support the proposal). Only if each of these qualifications were met could the local authority open a library. In 1893 (1894 in Scotland) local authorities were allowed to establish a library service by local authority resolution, without recourse to a special vote by ratepayers.

routine, on-going responsibility of the controlling local authority.<sup>17</sup> Local state action, enabled by central state legislation, thus began to roll back the boundaries of the voluntary library sector.

Whereas enthusiasm for today's public library appears to have slipped into reverse gear, in the mid-nineteenth century the idea of the public library had a strong forward momentum. Admittedly, that momentum took time to build. The permissive nature of public library legislation (a permissiveness that lasted until the 1964, when local authorities were finally compelled to provide a library service) was born of a suspicion of taxes; while the absence of central government assistance was created by the perception of centralisation as un-English. Having to obtain local tax-payer consent was a persistent and major obstacle to the building of anything approaching a national library service (by 1868 just twenty-seven local authorities in Britain had adopted the public library legislation, around half of these in the industrial and commercial centres of the midlands and the North; although by 1886 another ninety-eight had been added to this number).<sup>18</sup> The take up of library legislation was patchy: some municipalities witnessed the mobilisation of an army of anti-library economisers (who could be found across the social classes), while others – Birmingham being the leading example – embraced and celebrated the public library as a core component of the civic gospel.<sup>19</sup>

### Nineteenth-Century State Intervention

That the idea of state-promoted and -supported libraries was able to gain traction when it did, in the 1830s and 1840s, was in part due to the growth of state intervention generally in the early-nineteenth century. The extent to which laissez-faire existed in the nineteenth century has long been the subject of debate among historians.<sup>20</sup> The current consensus, however, is that the outright,

17 Although for five years between the inaugural Act of 1850 and amending legislation in 1855 collections could only be assembled through donations.

18 Kelly, *A History of Public Libraries in Great Britain, 1845–1975*, p. 72.

19 A. Black, 'National Provision and Local Politics', in M. Kinnell Evans and P. Sturges (eds.), *Continuity and Innovation in the Public Library: The Development of a Social Institution* (London: Library Association, 1995), pp. 48–66.

20 For example, see, in date order: J.B. Brebner, 'Laissez Faire and State Intervention in Nineteenth-Century Britain', *The Journal of Economic History*, 8, Supplement: The Tasks of Economic History (1948), pp. 59–73; O. MacDonagh, 'The Nineteenth-Century Revolution in Government: A Reappraisal', *The Historical Journal*, 1.1 (1958), pp. 52–67; H. Paris, 'The Nineteenth-Century Revolution in Government: A Reappraisal Reappraised',

or even widespread, application of the 'let alone' philosophy during this period is largely a myth.<sup>21</sup> It has been proposed that the myth evolved as a mid-nineteenth century war cry, a slogan created by political economy in its fight against the landed oligarchy, initially, and organised labour, thereafter. The myth of laissez-faire was given fresh impetus by the publication in 1905 of A.V. Dicey's *Lectures on the Relation Between Law and Opinion in England during the Nineteenth Century*.<sup>22</sup> Dicey's identification of the period 1825 to 1865 as one of "individualism" and that of 1865–1900 as one of "collectivism" represented, in effect, an argument against the latter at a time when government activity was seen by economic liberals to be escalating dangerously (in response to the late-nineteenth century "re-discovery of poverty" the interventionist Labour Party was emerging and the Liberal welfare reforms, entailing state pensions, schools meals and workers' insurance against sickness and injury, were just around the corner).<sup>23</sup>

By the middle of the nineteenth century Britain had become a modern state, the characteristics of which were incompatible with significant non-engagement on the part of central government administration. Economic and social developments precipitated increased intervention. Rapid unregulated industrialisation and large-scale population growth (in England it increased from 8 million in 1801 to 25 million in 1881)<sup>24</sup> brought with them the expansion of an uneducated, barbarised underclass, increasing urban squalor, misery and petty crime, disruptive labour-employer relations and housing and public-health problems – a cocktail of vicissitudes that formed the background for

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*The Historical Journal*, 3.1 (1960), pp. 17–37; R.L. Crouch, 'Laissez-Faire in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Myth or Reality?', *The Manchester School of Economic & Social Studies*, 35.3 (January 1967), pp. 199–215; W.C. Lubenow, *The Politics of Government Growth: Early Victorian Attitudes towards State Intervention, 1833–1848* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1971); A.J. Taylor, *Laissez-Faire and State Intervention in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Macmillan, 1972); C.J. Holmes, 'Laissez-Faire in Theory and Practice: Britain, 1800–1875', *Journal of European Economic History*, 5.3 (1976), pp. 671–88; O. MacDonagh, *Early Victorian Government, 1830–1870* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1977); P.W.J. Bartrip, 'State Intervention in Mid-Nineteenth Century Britain: Fact or Fiction?', *Journal of British Studies*, 23.1 (Autumn 1983), pp. 63–83.

21 E.J. Evans, *The Forging of the Modern State: Early Industrial Britain 1783–1870*, 3rd edn. (London: Pearson Education, 2001), p. 295.

22 A.V. Dicey, *Lectures on the Relation between Law and Opinion in England during the Nineteenth Century* (London: Macmillan, 1905). Dicey's book arose from a series of lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1898.

23 Brebner, 'Laissez Faire and State Intervention', p. 60; Bartrip, 'State Intervention in Mid-Nineteenth Century Britain', p. 63.

24 G. Kitson Clark, *The Making of Victorian England* (London: Methuen, 1965), p. 66.

rising levels of discontent and occasional outbreaks of violent revolt. Revolution in government, therefore, was precipitated not only by humanitarian sentiments but also by social and demographic pressures that were clearly and extensively evidenced in the 'Blue Book' publications arising out of 'scientific' parliamentary investigations.<sup>25</sup> Other state-facilitating, or -favouring, forces included the development of various forms of communication – the railway, the telegraph, the mechanisation of printing – which encouraged homogenisation and centralisation.<sup>26</sup> In addition, intervention was prompted by the need to secure future industrial and economic gains: the nineteenth century saw laissez-faire and state intervention develop in parallel, both being, as Brebner stressed, "constant accompaniments of the basic force – industrialisation".<sup>27</sup>

Counter-intuitively, state intervention was in fact endorsed by classical political economists who, far from claiming a natural right for free enterprise, accepted the need for state action if it delivered a 'greater good' than the free market could not deliver. For example, in the *Wealth of Nations* (1776) Adam Smith wrote that the "sovereign" had the duty of maintaining "certain public works and ... institutions, which it can never be for the interest of any individual ... to ... maintain".<sup>28</sup> In the vocabulary of Benthamism, any free-market initiative needed to answer to the principle of utility. Where the free market generated positive utility, as in the case of the abolition of the protection of agriculture, it was justified; but where it produced negative utility, as in the case of an unregulated, unsafe and monopolistic railway system, then government intervention was legitimate. In other words, the 'nightwatchman' conception of the state – where the business of government was seen as simply affording protection against internal or external violence and criminal behaviour – was far too narrow for even the classical political economists, who never believed that the invisible hand of the market, unfettered by state action, assured the general welfare.<sup>29</sup>

The first half of the nineteenth century witnessed multiple interventions by the state. Following the first grants for education in 1839, a state inspectorate for schools and a state-sponsored teacher-training scheme were established in 1839 and 1846, respectively. Several acts in the first half of the nineteenth century regulated the transport of emigrants and in 1844 a Railways Board, with

25 Lubenow, *The Politics of Government Growth*, p. 12.

26 Favouring and resisting forces are discussed in MacDonagh, *Early Victorian Government*, pp. 1–21.

27 Brebner, 'Laissez Faire and State Intervention', p. 69.

28 Quoted in Crouch, 'Laissez-Faire in Nineteenth-Century Britain', p. 206.

29 Parris, 'The Nineteenth-Century Revolution in Government', pp. 35–36.

powers of inspection and accident investigation, was established. The Prison Act (1835) set up a prison inspectorate. A flat-rate, national 'penny' post was inaugurated in 1840. Commencing in 1819 with the prohibition of employment of children under the age of nine, a series of Parliamentary Acts gave greater protection to workers in textile factories, culminating in an act of 1847 which effectively limited the workday for all millhands to ten hours. In 1856 legislation giving shareholders limited liability in the case of a company's failure was passed. Perhaps the "deepest breaches in the dyke of laissez-faire" were made in public health legislation: the Cholera Act (1832) and the Vaccination Act (1840) were followed by the Contagious Diseases Acts (1864, 1866, 1869).<sup>30</sup> The Public Health Act (1848) established a central Board of Health. A sign of things to come, income tax, having first been introduced in the Napoleonic Wars, was re-introduced in 1842, never to be abolished again.<sup>31</sup>

Once set in motion, of course, the administrative machinery of the state became a self-generating and "ultimately irresistible authority",<sup>32</sup> possessing "an internal dynamic which would not be contained".<sup>33</sup> Incremental and modest in scale, however, nineteenth-century state intervention was a world away from the collectivism that developed in the twentieth century; certainly, in the middle of the nineteenth century, when public libraries first appeared, there would have been no conceptualisation of the centralisation that was to come.<sup>34</sup> In addition, interventionist legislation did not always lead to intervention in practice. For example, laws designed to protect workers were often ignored, the regulatory bodies overseeing implementation often too over-stretched to ensure compliance.<sup>35</sup> Intervention was also kept in check by a persistent quest for economy (although it needs to be stressed that the pursuit of economies in government expenditure, even of the aggressive kind, do not in themselves

30 Evans, *The Forging of the Modern State*, p. 295.

31 Many of these developments are discussed in Evans, *The Forging of the Modern State*, pp. 266–95. On social reform, see E. Midwinter, *Victorian Social Reform* (London: Longmans, 1968).

32 MacDonagh, 'The Nineteenth-Century Revolution in Government', p. 59.

33 Evans, *The Forging of the Modern State*, p. 266.

34 Lubenow, *The Politics of Government Growth*, p. 180. There is disagreement as to the moment that Britain pivoted towards collectivism: R.F. Haggard, *The Persistence of Victorian Liberalism: The Politics of Social Reform in Britain, 1870–1900* (Westport, CT & London: Greenwood Press, 2001), pp. 1–8. The First World War, however, was a seminal period in this regard, representing a clear shift towards collectivism, even if we consider that a shift had already got underway. During the war the size of the civil service just about quadrupled.

35 Bartrip, 'State Intervention in Mid-Nineteenth Century Britain', pp. 66, 81.

imply a commitment to laissez-faire).<sup>36</sup> An example of the heavy emphasis placed on economy is that even in 1901 the civil service had only in the region of 50,000 employees.<sup>37</sup> Finally, most intervention, it is important to remember, occurred at a local level, as was the case with the Poor Law, for example. Local government received vastly increased power with the passing of the Municipal Corporations Act (1835) which, amongst other things, provided for the election of town councillors by local tax papers. The work of the local state was seen as being enshrined in tradition, common law, and what Ludenow described as the “ancient Saxon constitution”.<sup>38</sup>

### The Justification of State Intervention in the Case of the Early Public Library

State action's localist tradition certainly informed the early public library movement. Public libraries could only be formed with local consent. This does not mean, however, that they commanded no universal purpose, nor that they lacked a collectivist quality that anticipated the deeper collectivism of the twentieth century. For example, much of the evidence given by the British Museum cataloguer and library expert Edwards to the Parliamentary Select Committee on Public Libraries in 1849 (which paved the way for the inaugural legislation the following year) focused on the nation's failure to provide free access to libraries compared to the more liberal access supposedly offered in many parts of continental Europe.<sup>39</sup> The Birmingham religious minister George Dawson told the Committee that public libraries were the necessary corollary to any state, or national, system of education: school gave children a taste for reading, he pointed out, but the means of satisfying that taste through life were not being provided.<sup>40</sup> Elsewhere Dawson trumpeted that the public

36 Holmes, 'Laissez-Faire in Theory and Practice', p. 687.

37 Institute for Government, *The Civil Service Workforce* (2014), retrieved 21 June 2016 from [http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/WM2014\\_Workforce.pdf](http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/WM2014_Workforce.pdf).

38 Ludenow, *The Politics of Government Growth*, p. 183. The localism of intervention, in the context of the longevity of state and official surveillance, has also been stressed by E. Higgs, *The Information State in England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

39 *Report of the Select Committee on Public Libraries; together with the proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix* (London: The House of Commons, 23 July 1849). Edwards was the Committee's chief and pivotal witness.

40 *Report of the Select Committee on Public Libraries*, Question 1308. Dawson agreed with the Committee Chairman, William Ewart, that libraries were a good way of « elevating the character of the labouring classes, and improving their social condition » (Question 1307).



library was a “holy Communion, a wise Socialism”,<sup>41</sup> a perspective later echoed by the figurehead of Victorian civic patriotism Joseph Chamberlain who, when speaking at the opening the new central library in Birmingham in 1882, described the institution of the public library as “a kind of communism which the least revolutionary of all of us may be proud to advocate”.<sup>42</sup>

The philosophical reasoning behind state intervention in the library field was both idealistic and utilitarian in character.<sup>43</sup> Libraries stood for a communal social existence because books, it was often said, could speak alike to rich and poor; and the buildings in which books were consulted and from which they were borrowed were venues for social-class mixing, de-pressurising class tensions and building a sense of civic community. The library ‘collective’ helped individuals to advance – the informed man “will frequently rise as the uninformed man sinks”,<sup>44</sup> enthused self-taught social reformer Francis Place – which, in turn, enhanced the ‘social’. To improve oneself was an altruistic act because in doing so a citizen would become less dependent on others and, in addition, the community would extract utility from any individual’s moral advance – that is, the culture of self-improvement coalesced with that of collective betterment. Whereas the distribution of ‘doles’ demoralised citizens, by invigorating municipal life through institutions like libraries people would have access to cultural enrichment that would allow them to grow out of whatever dependency threatened their future moral and material development.

This emphasis on the interconnectedness of individual morality and the ‘waste’ created by social atomism was supported by a teleological reckoning that said reading and education were an investment not an expense: for example, money spent on books would save money spent on gaols and workhouses; while skilled workers with free access to books would become more technically proficient and more attuned to tasteful design, thus adding value to production. Contributing to this teleological, Benthamite discourse, the economist Stanley Jevons challenged classical laissez-faire doctrine by pointing to the ability of the state to increase social utility in areas like housing, public health, education – and libraries. The main *raison d’être* of public libraries

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41 Borough of Birmingham, *Opening of the Free Reference Library ... Inaugural Address by George Dawson* (Birmingham, 1866), p. 17.

42 Quoted in T. Greenwood, *Free Public Libraries* (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1886), p. 75.

43 A. Black, *A New History of The English Public Library: Social and Intellectual Contexts, 1850–1914* (London: Leicester University Press, 1996).

44 F. Place, *Improvement of the Working People* (London: C. Fox, 1834), p. 9.

and other public institutions, he argued, was “the enormous increase of public utility which is thereby acquired for the community at a trifling cost”.<sup>45</sup>

Such arguments tipped the scales of library provision in favour of state action. The voluntary library sector continued to be an important cultural force after mid-century but it had to contend constantly with competition from a public library sector that grew rapidly (especially from the 1880s onwards) and, despite never being anywhere near luxuriously funded, increasingly benefited financially from a growing number of local taxpayers, from rising rateable values and, in a few places, from permission granted by special acts of Parliament to exceed the ‘one penny in the pound’ cap on the amount that could be charged to run a public library service.

The growing presence of the state in the library field was driven most obviously from below, by an increasingly literate populace which welcomed free access to books, newspapers and magazines in a society and economy that required much higher levels of knowledge-acquisition, reasoning and function reading than had been required in the past. But it was also fuelled by ideological discourse from above. Pro-public library arguments came from liberals who believed that Britain’s future was entrepreneurial rather than paternalistic. Arguments also came from radicals who, while recognising that the clock could not be turned back to a pre-industrial past, sought to counter the social deficiencies that accompanied industrial advance. The remainder of this chapter examines, briefly, the mid-century library thinking of a representative from each of these camps: the patron saint of self-help, Samuel Smiles, and the reformer James Silk Buckingham.

### Samuel Smiles: Libraries, Self-Help and the State

A popular writer on Victorian liberalism, Samuel Smiles is best known for his book *Self-Help* (1859), which by 1905, the year after his death, had sold over a quarter-of-a-million copies.<sup>46</sup> Largely due to Smiles, the term ‘self-help’

45 S. Jevons, ‘The Rationale of Free Public Libraries’, *Contemporary Review*, 39 (1881), p. 385. Jevons’s principle of the “multiplication of utility” anticipated the digital information society notion of information being the only resource that is not necessarily depleted when ‘used’, because when shared information has the tendency to reproduce itself.

46 On the life of Samuel Smiles, see: ‘Smiles, Samuel (1812–1904)’, by H.C.G. Matthew, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); T. Travers, *Samuel Smiles and the Victorian Work Ethic* (New York & London: Garland, 1987); T. Travers, ‘Samuel Smiles and the Origins of Self-Help: Reform and the New Enlightenment’, *Albion*, 9.2 (Summer 1977), pp. 161–87; J.F.C. Harrison, ‘The Victorian Gospel of Success’, *Victorian Studies*, 1.2 (1957–8), pp. 155–64; A. Briggs, *Victorian People: A Reassessment of Persons and*

became the gospel of Victorian liberalism and a potent symbol of Victorian morality and progress. In the wake of *Self-Help*, Smiles's fame – "Cholera itself could have travelled no faster",<sup>47</sup> remarked Asa Briggs – spread far and wide, both in Britain and abroad. To be clear, however, Smiles's championing of self-help did not mean that he also championed laissez-faire. This was clearly evident in his attitude to libraries.

Although Smiles was of the opinion that "over-government" rendered people "comparatively helpless",<sup>48</sup> he in fact rejected pure laissez-faire, steering a course instead between outright paternalism and the unfettered operation of the free market.<sup>49</sup> In this respect he espoused so-called 'artificial' Benthamism, which advocated the removal – by state action if necessary – of barriers that discouraged self-help ('natural' Benthamism, on the other hand, espoused pure self-help).<sup>50</sup> Smiles supported the principle that where social evils and abuses could be removed, government intervention could be considered – in areas like education and sanitary reform, for example.<sup>51</sup> He was a firm believer in the utilitarian teaching that environment was uppermost in the formation of character; and from this belief came his advocacy for legislation that would enable utility-producing environmental influences to operate freely.<sup>52</sup> Leaving the poor to rely on the voluntary principle alone in all matters was wrong; the alternative option of state intervention was available, he wrote, "to help the feeble, to elevate the depressed and to cultivate the ignorant".<sup>53</sup> In *Thrift* (1875) Smiles laid great blame at the door of the 'let alone' principle, which he re-named "Nobody". "More mischief is done by Nobody", he wrote, "than by all the world besides. Nobody adulterates our food ... supplies us with foul water ... spreads fever in blind alleys ... leaves towns undrained ... fills gaols".<sup>54</sup>

These precepts can be glimpsed in the evidence that Smiles gave to the Select Committee on Public Libraries in 1849.<sup>55</sup> Based largely on his knowledge

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*Themes, 1851–1867* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), pp. 124–47; T. Mackay (ed.), *The Autobiography of Samuel Smiles* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1905); K. Fielden, 'Samuel Smiles and Self-Help', *Victorian Studies*, 12.2 (December 1968), pp. 155–76.

47 Briggs, *Victorian People*, p. 126.

48 S. Smiles, *Self-Help: With Illustrations of Conduct and Perseverance* (London: John Murray, 1905 [1859]), p. 1.

49 Travers, *Samuel Smiles and the Victorian Work Ethic*, p. 136.

50 Ibid., note. 249, p. 218.

51 Ibid., p. 125.

52 Travers, 'Samuel Smiles and the Origins of Self-Help', p. 166.

53 Quoted in Travers, *Samuel Smiles and the Victorian Work Ethic*, p. 157.

54 S. Smiles, *Thrift*, Popular edition (London, 1897), p. 337.

55 *Report of the Select Committee on Public Libraries*. Smiles answered questions before the Committee on 10 May 1849.

of libraries in Yorkshire (he lived a good amount of his life in Leeds), he observed that many popular social libraries were beginning to fail.<sup>56</sup> Many of these libraries depended on voluntary gifts of books (many unattractive) simply to survive, and were thus not in the best place to succeed.<sup>57</sup> He provided a good deal of information to the Committee about the Yorkshire Union of Mechanics' Institutes which comprised seventy-nine institutions, with libraries attached.<sup>58</sup> These were subscribed to largely by the "middle and respectable classes" and by "superior" working men "receiving comparatively high wages".<sup>59</sup> They offered fiction in large amounts but a taste for better literature, Smiles suggested, was growing.<sup>60</sup>

Smiles urged that action be taken to cater for the lower classes of society, which mechanics' institutes and other voluntary libraries tended not to attract. There were, he testified, some voluntary libraries for the poor, such as those run in connection with mutual improvement societies, where subscriptions could be as low as 1d. or 2d. per week,<sup>61</sup> but these were not numerous and remained out of the financial reach of many. He agreed with a rhetorical question put to him that the Museums Act of 1845 (which had permitted local authorities to charge ratepayers, if they consented, for the establishment of a local museum, with a library attached if required) could be built upon to provide free municipal libraries.<sup>62</sup> People who could not afford the subscriptions charged by voluntary libraries would, believed Smiles, avail themselves of free libraries;<sup>63</sup> and this would be especially the case during downturns of trade.<sup>64</sup>

There was an increasing desire for education among the working classes, Smiles observed, and free libraries, he argued, could satisfy this desire, especially if stocked with attractive books.<sup>65</sup> Free libraries would improve the

56 Ibid., Question 1952.

57 Ibid., Question 1953.

58 On mechanics' institutes, see M. Walker, *The Development of the Mechanics' Institute Movement in Britain and Beyond: Supporting Further Education for the Adult Working Classes* (London: Routledge, 2016).

59 *Report of the Select Committee on Public Libraries*, Question 1956. Although Smiles' writings featured 'great men' his philosophy was also very much influenced by what he saw in Yorkshire in the 1830s and 1840s in respect of members of a respectable working-class who educated themselves by dogged perseverance: Fielden, 'Samuel Smiles and Self-Help', p. 168.

60 Ibid., Questions 1960, 1961, 1962.

61 Ibid., Question 1984.

62 Ibid., Question 1973.

63 Ibid., Question 1980.

64 Ibid., Question 1991.

65 Ibid., Questions 1995, 1996.

“moral and intellectual condition of the working population” and would help pull people away from spending time “in dissipation or in idleness”.<sup>66</sup> The borrowing of books for home reading was critical in this respect.<sup>67</sup> It appeared to Smiles “that the second-best *gift* which the Government could bestow on the working classes of this country, next to a good system of secular instruction, would be a library in every town and village of the empire”.<sup>68</sup> He advocated a local tax for this purpose, the spending that arose from it being subjected to central inspection: a “Minister of Instruction and Progress” to watch over the institutions would be established to check abuses.<sup>69</sup> Radically, he advocated central spending to supplement local expenditure: “pecuniary aid in proportion to the contributions raised in the districts” would persuade local tax payers in the wisdom of their giving.<sup>70</sup> These were hardly the principles of an unwavering economic liberal, contrary to his mythical status as such.

### James Silk Buckingham: Libraries, Planning and Control

Adventurer, seaman, travel writer, journalist, publisher, parliamentarian, social reformer – this was the highly variegated and colourful identity of James Silk Buckingham who counted among his many interests the idea of establishing local public libraries across Britain.<sup>71</sup> In 1832 Buckingham was elected to Parliament to represent Sheffield, which he did for four years. The manifesto he had placed before the voters of Sheffield included a number of reforms: religious freedom; the securing of cheaper food; the removal of taxes on the press; making legal proceedings swifter and cheaper for all; the shortening of parliamentary terms to three years; the abolition of slavery; and the provision of public

66 Ibid., Question 2001.

67 Ibid., Question 2005.

68 Ibid., Question 2014, my emphasis.

69 Ibid.

70 Ibid., Question 2015.

71 On the life of James Silk Buckingham, see: R.E. Turner, *James Silk Buckingham, 1786–1855: A Social Biography* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1934); A. Nevins (ed.), *America through British Eyes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), pp. 226–27; James Silk Buckingham [Obituary], *Gentleman's Magazine*, 44, new series (September 1855), pp. 322–23; T. Morrison, *Unbuilt Utopian Cities 1460–1900: Reconstructing their Architecture and Political Philosophy* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), pp. 123–24. Upon his death Buckingham had completed the first two volumes of his planned four-volume autobiography: J.S. Buckingham, *Autobiography of James Silk Buckingham* (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1855).

open spaces. He also argued for colonial self-government and for the abolition of the press-gang and flogging in the navy.

Buckingham was a supporter of the movement for free trade which, in his opinion, would produce harmony and prosperity. He was critical, however, of political economists who ignored the worse effects of capitalism. He sought a more equitable distribution of wealth, though he opposed the communism advocated by labour radicals and Robert Owen, placing his hopes instead in autonomous association and cooperation.<sup>72</sup> Buckingham believed in state assistance for education. Education would imbue people with the principle of social duty as well as with knowledge of how to address – through thrift, hygienic practices and the avoidance of alcohol, for example – the social evils that were afflicting them.<sup>73</sup>

Buckingham was an advocate of income tax, writing on the subject in 1834, nearly a decade before it was re-introduced.<sup>74</sup> Income tax was important, he believed, because the state had “great and solemn duties to perform”.<sup>75</sup> Such duties included the provision of a national system of parochial and district schools, public works, assistance to emigrants and facilities for the elderly and disabled.<sup>76</sup> Though aware of the “odium which the very name of an Income Tax carries with it”, he was determined to pursue the issue. Income tax, he explained, “should bear as strict a relation as possible to the means of the individuals who have to pay it”.<sup>77</sup> He stated that “in England the rich are far too rich and the poor far too poor”.<sup>78</sup> A graduated income tax would help redistribute wealth, partly by providing the funds for rational-recreation and cultural institutions that would lead to the general improvement of the people. A seafarer, he likened society to a ship stricken by disease – in such circumstances everyone played their part to assist the sick and helpless. Buckingham was not what we would today call a ‘tax and spend’ politician or reformer but his attitude to the role of the state, seen through the tax issue, was unquestionably progressive.

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72 Morrison, *Unbuilt Utopian Cities*, p. 124.

73 After stepping down as a Sheffield M.P. Buckingham went on a four-year tour of the United States. He returned with high praise for the American education system and its facilities: Nevins, *America through British Eyes*, p. 210. See also J.S. Buckingham, *America: Historical, Statistic and Descriptive* (London: Fisher & Son, 1841).

74 He wrote a lengthy article in the *Parliamentary Review*, 5 (5 April 1834), which he re-published eleven years later as J.S. Buckingham, *Plan of an Improved Income Tax and Real Free Trade* (London: James Ridgway, 1845).

75 Buckingham, *Plan of an Improved Income Tax*, p. 11.

76 *Ibid.*, pp. 62–64.

77 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

78 Turner, *James Silk Buckingham, 1786–1855*, p. 336.

This was evident in his endeavours in Parliament in favour of a tax-based cultural policy. In 1834 Buckingham chaired a Select Committee on Inquiry into Drunkenness. Its report advocated the establishment of public walks and gardens, open spaces for “athletic and healthy exercises” and “district and parish libraries, museums and reading rooms” by the “joint aid of the government and the local authorities”.<sup>79</sup> Following hard on the heels of his Select Committee on Inquiry into Drunkenness (as well as a Select Committee on Public Walks, whose report had been authored by the utilitarian John Roebuck in 1833),<sup>80</sup> he introduced a Public Institutions Bill in 1835 which sought the provision of a range of rational-recreation and cultural facilities and spaces that would be free and open to the public: walks, gardens, lecture halls, music rooms, bath houses, institutes, museums – and libraries.<sup>81</sup> The Bill also advocated a national system of education. This was the first attempt in Parliament to secure legislation for local authorities to establish libraries out of local taxes. Anticipating the library ‘cultural centres’ of the 1960s, the Bill envisaged that in some localities single, poly-purpose institutions (which included not only a library and attached reading rooms but also a lecture hall, other rooms for meetings, school rooms, a theatre, a museum and a picture gallery) would be established.<sup>82</sup> A seasoned international traveller, having by the 1830s visited the Middle East and India, Buckingham was aware of other cultures and thus also of the role education and cultural enrichment could play in expanding people’s minds to understand the world better. Buckingham’s bill came to nothing but it certainly paved the way for the later campaign for public libraries in the 1840s.<sup>83</sup>

79 *Report of the Select Committee on Inquiry into Drunkenness* (London: The House of Commons, 1834), p. viii.

80 F.E. Hyde, ‘Utilitarian Town Planning, 1825–1845’, *The Town Planning Review* 19.3&4 (1947), pp. 153–59.

81 On the Public Institutions Bill, see W.J. Murison, *The Public Library: Its Origins, Purpose and Significance*, 3rd edn. (London: Clive Bingley, 1988), pp. 31–33; and E.R. Reid-Smith, *Parliament and Popular Culture in the Early Nineteenth Century* (Oldham: Research in Librarianship, 1969). In fact, Buckingham attempted to bring in three bills in total, the other two being attempts to regulate the drink trade and to establish public spaces and walks. None of his three bills reached the floor of the House of Commons. Buckingham attempted to bring his three bills forward again in 1836, and a bill combining all of them in 1837, but to no avail. On these Parliamentary endeavours, see Kelly, *A History of Public Libraries in Great Britain*, p. 8.

82 A. Black, *Libraries of Light: British Public Library Design in the Long 1960s* (London: Routledge, 2016), especially pp. 118–33.

83 His cultural literacy is transparent in the large number of travel books he wrote. See, for example, his: *Travels in Mesopotamia* (London: Colburn, 1827); *Travels in Assyria, Media*

While working on his Public Institutions Bill, Buckingham began to observe and consider the “great defects of all existing towns”.<sup>84</sup> This propelled him to draw up a plan for a model town, replete with a central library and multiple neighbourhood reading rooms, as a potential solution to urban blight. In the tradition of the utilitarian belief in the power of environment to shape character and moral action,<sup>85</sup> Buckingham envisioned an ideal urban environment in which individuals could maximise their potential and contribute more effectively to the common good, things which towns in industrial Britain were failing to do. As Buckingham wrote in the book that detailed his model town, *National Evils and Practical Remedies* (1849):<sup>86</sup>

A person who is well fed, well clad, cheerfully because agreeably occupied, living in a clean house, in an open and well ventilated Town, free from the intemperate, dissolute, and vicious associations of our existing cities and villages – with ready access to Libraries, Lectures, Galleries of Art, Public Worship, with many objects of architectural beauty, fountains, statues, and colonnades, around him, instead of rags, filth, drunkenness, and prostitution, with blasphemous oaths or dissolute conversation defiling his ears, would at least be more likely to be accessible to moral sentiments, generous feelings, and religious and devout convictions and conduct than in the teeming hives of iniquity, with which most of our large cities and towns abound.<sup>87</sup>

The aim of Buckingham’s plan was to banish the evils of disease, vice, crime, poverty and antagonistic feelings from urban life. His town would combine “every advantage of beauty, security, healthfulness, and convenience” and the “latest discoveries in architecture and science”.<sup>88</sup>

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*and Persia* (London: Colburn, 1830); and *The Slave States of America* (London: Fisher & Son, 1842).

84 J.S. Buckingham, *National Evils and Practical Remedies with the Plan for a Model Town* (London: Peter Jackson, Late Fisher, Son, 1849), p. 25.

85 Hyde, ‘Utilitarian Town Planning’.

86 Buckingham’s *National Evils* was divided into two main sections. His plan for a model town was preceded by a description of the multiple evils afflicting the nation, as it moved from an agricultural to an industrial society.

87 Buckingham, *National Evils*, pp. 224–25. Buckingham is replicating here, though less eloquently, the observations made by Frederick Engels four years earlier: F. Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971 [1845]).

88 Buckingham, *National Evils*, p. 141.



Buckingham named his model town “Victoria”.<sup>89</sup> With a maximum population of 10,000 occupying an area of one-mile square, Victoria was of low density. It was rationally organised into a series of concentric squares formed by spacious streets punctuated by eight wide avenues radiating from the centre. The town’s architecture was a picturesque mix of eastern and classical styles, in the tradition of the Royal Pavilion, Brighton (1822). Buildings increased in scale, grandeur and importance towards the centre of the town. In the squares immediately surrounding the town’s central feature (a 300-foot high bell-and-clock tower crowned by an electric arc light) were situated the mansions of the wealthy and a range of civic buildings, which included administrative offices, a post office, a bank, an art gallery, a museum, a university, places of worship – and a library. Moving away from the centre could be found houses of decreasing value and size, workshops, covered promenades and arcades and open spaces in which were situated freestanding buildings providing schools and gymnasiums, communal dining halls, drawing rooms – and reading rooms (each attached to a suite of public baths). Factories and large-scale public utilities were located beyond the town, as were parks and ornamental gardens.

Victoria was to be run on associational grounds (when travelling in America 1837–40 Buckingham had visited Shaker and Rappite communities and was impressed by their cooperative arrangements). The town would have an oligoptic quality. Wide streets secured ventilation, expelled the noxious gases that Victorians feared were the basis of disease and provided the conduits for good drainage, a healthy water supply and efficient sewerage (each dwelling was to have its own water closet). They also facilitated good light and visibility, even at night when the central tower’s electric lamp provided a substitute for sunlight. Matching this physical openness, learning and intellectual exchange were encouraged in public-sphere institutions – like the library and local reading rooms. This would encourage social harmony, which was underwritten by control in the form of rules of behaviour – such as the prohibition of alcohol, prostitution and gambling – productive of order. As Otter has put it, in Victoria “the classes would be visually united, and the free circulation of opinion, as well as maximum exposure to imitable conduct, would be materially secured”.<sup>90</sup>

89 For an assessment of Victoria, C. Otter, *The Victorian Eye: A Political History of Light and Vision in Britain, 1800–1910* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), pp. 72–73; and Morrison, *Unbuilt Utopian Cities*, p. 123. On the history of the utopian city generally, see R. Eaton, *Ideal Cities: Utopianism and the (Un)Built Environment* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002), in which Buckingham’s Victoria is discussed pp. 145–47.

90 Otter, *The Victorian Eye*, p. 72.

Victoria's cooperative life, including its library and reading rooms, was reflected in the way it was to be financed. Being a voluntary scheme, there would be no funding from government. Residents would be shareholders of a town association. The number of shares that needed to be purchased would be dependent on wealth, and the poor would be allowed to pay in instalments. In addition, certain institutions, the library and reading rooms among them, would be paid for out of a public fund derived from a graduated income tax.<sup>91</sup>

Although a product of voluntarism and associationalist thinking, Victoria also anticipated twentieth-century planning and the welfare state. This was true most obviously in terms of urban planning: in the tradition of Wren's great plan for London, Victoria at once predicted future model town schemes such as Titus Salt's utopian factory village Saltaire, Ebenezer Howard's garden city, the garden-suburb cottage estates of the inter-war years and the new towns of the post-war decades. Victoria was paternalistic and planned, not just physically but socially also. Visits to hospital and visits by a doctor to the home were both free of charge. Conditions of labour, including maximum hours, were protected for all sections of the workforce. Not surprisingly, in this welfare-focused model town there was also an emphasis on model cultural institutions, including its model central libraries and twelve model reading rooms.<sup>92</sup> In a harmonious society like Victoria, Buckingham predicted, less would be spent on war and protection against crime and more on institutions like libraries.<sup>93</sup> While not a direct product of Victorian interventionism, Buckingham's Victoria was nonetheless a microcosm of the planned and controlled interventionism that was to come, its library, reading rooms and other cultural institutions funded communally, even if some residents chose voluntarily not to use them.

## Conclusion

In 2015 a campaign – “My Library By Right” – was launched by the UK's Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) which championed everybody's right to public libraries. This was a stern reminder that local authorities in Britain have a legal duty to provide “comprehensive and efficient” public library services and that central government has a legal duty regarding the stewardship and improvement of them.<sup>94</sup> The launch of the

91 Buckingham, *National Evils*, p. 214.

92 Ibid., pp. 132, 206.

93 Ibid., p. 100.

94 ‘My Library by Right’, *CILIP Update* (December/January 2015/2016), pp. 6–7.

campaign represented a direct response to fears that British public libraries are withering on the vine, crippled by years of deep cuts in the financial support they receive from the state. Some in the library world view these cuts as less to do with money than with ideology, an excuse, in effect, for rolling back the state.<sup>95</sup> A recent government-commissioned report on public libraries – insipid in its eagerness to blame local government for failing to take more adaptable, innovative and transformational approaches and, despite its title and sub-title, in its denial of any crisis and in its lack of any convincing visionary ambition for the institution<sup>96</sup> – does little to dissuade one from such a belief.

The state's increasing disengagement from public libraries today, and its commensurate encouragement of the voluntary ethic in this context, contrasts starkly with the great trust mid-nineteenth century library enthusiasts, such as Samuel Smiles and James Silk Buckingham, as well as readers from all social classes, invested in state action in the library field. Yet, according to today's neo-liberals, the mid-nineteenth century was a time when the state was beneficially – to the extent of guaranteeing Victorian greatness – absent from much of British social, cultural and economic life. In fact, this perceived absence is largely a myth, serving as a convenient means of undermining arguments for collectivism and even those who take a more pragmatic view of the potentially beneficial role of the state. As the boundaries of the public library sector shrink, space is perhaps opening up for a resurgence of the subscription and commercial – fee-based – library.<sup>97</sup> In a postmodern world of quickly changing tastes and widening choice increased voluntary, non-state action in the library field should surely not be rejected out of hand, but it would be shameful if such developments were to proceed at the expense of public libraries – libraries which in the mid-nineteenth century were widely and, importantly, increasingly viewed, in stark contrast to today, as a gilt-edged *public good*.

95 Nick Poole, Chief Executive of the Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals, speaking at the 'Speak Up For Libraries' Conference (14 November 2015), retrieved 19 November 2015 from [http://www.cilip.org.uk/news/speak-libraries-speech-nick-poole?utm\\_source=Communicator\\_membership\\_list&utm\\_medium=Email&utm\\_content=Untitled11&utm\\_campaign=Weekly+News+from+CILIP%2c+19+November+2015](http://www.cilip.org.uk/news/speak-libraries-speech-nick-poole?utm_source=Communicator_membership_list&utm_medium=Email&utm_content=Untitled11&utm_campaign=Weekly+News+from+CILIP%2c+19+November+2015).

96 Libraries Taskforce, *Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England*, 2016–2021 (2016).

97 S. Shoker, 'The Fall and Rise of Subscription Libraries', *BBC News* (10 April 2016), retrieved 17 December 2016 from <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-nottinghamshire-35831853>.



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